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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

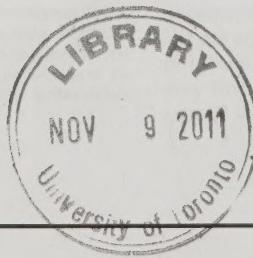
House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 033 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 20, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer



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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 20, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to four petitions.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

BILL C-18—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): moved:

That, in relation to Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, not more than two further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the Bill; and

That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for Government Orders on the second day allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the said Bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this Order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the Bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1 there will now be a 30 minute question period.

[*English*]

I invite hon. members who wish to ask questions to rise in their places so the Chair has some idea of the number of members who wish to participate.

I would ask members if they could keep their questions to approximately one minute and the responses a similar length of time so we can accommodate as many members as possible. As we have done before, the Chair will give precedence to members of opposition parties. While we will still allow some members of the government to ask questions, this is primarily for the opposition to question the government.

I will recognize the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, before I ask my question, I would suggest that you should probably not let the minister answer anything so we can use up some of the time on meaningful comments rather than the responses we will get from him.

My question for the minister is fairly straightforward. How many more of these time allocation motions are we going to have? We have sat for 25 days and I think this is the fourth time allocation motion on bills that are extremely important, this one at least as much as some of the other ones where time allocation has been moved.

The effect of time allocation is to end all debate at second reading stage on a bill that is extremely important. It is a historically important structure within the Government of Canada going back many years. The government is limiting debate to what will be a little over three days on a very important bill.

How many government members want to speak to it? I know many of our members want to speak to it.

How many more times is the minister going to do this?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find that a bit hypocritical coming from the member for Windsor—Tecumseh when he stood up and voted to adjourn debate yesterday. We are actually moving forward and giving him two more full days of debate in spite of his voting to adjourn debate at the end of the very first day. I am not sure exactly where he thinks he is on stable ground with that.

Government Orders

As the member well knows, time allocation is a valuable tool used by governments when it is needed. I do agree with his point that we do this when it is extremely important, but extremely important for the citizens of Canada and in this case, for western Canadian farmers.

What we are looking for is fairness. The member's farmers in Ontario have access to a voluntary board, which is doing extremely well. They made that change in 2003.

I am not sure how the member can stand in his place and say it is okay for his farmers in Ontario but the guys out in western Canada cannot have the same rights and privileges. That is absolutely untenable in a democracy, which is why we are seeking to make this change. We will use whatever is necessary to make that happen in a timely way.

•(1010)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we in the Liberal Party are very disappointed in the way the government is manipulating the prairie wheat farmer.

The other day the government said that this was all about freedom. If we talk to the tens of thousands of prairie grain and wheat farmers, this is not about freedom. What the government is doing is crippling many opportunities for the farmers of small and large operations alike. Those farmers want this bill to be thoroughly debated.

The government is completely disregarding what a vast majority of the prairie wheat farmers wanted and said so in a plebiscite. Over 60% said that they want to retain the Wheat Board, but the Prime Minister has said that does not matter and the government is getting rid of it. Now the Prime Minister is allowing only a couple days of debate.

I ask the Minister of Agriculture, why does the government not respect the majority of prairie grain farmers who said they want to retain the Canadian Wheat Board?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I am wondering who really is manipulating prairie farmers when I look across at the third party down at the end over there. Those members do not represent any farmers at all. Even the member for Wascana has 11 rural polls which the Conservative candidate won in that particular area.

We were very open in our campaign regarding an open and accountable Canadian Wheat Board, something different, something new, something similar to what there is in Ontario, following the Australian model where we saw freedom reign. Farmers are doing better.

The member also talked about small farms. Those same small farms grow canola and other special crops and are doing extremely well with those. Even when we talk to someone like Nettie Wiebe, who is the former president of the NFU, she tells us that canola is grown on her farm because a cash crop is needed. If the Wheat Board is giving farmers a premium price and doing such a great job, why do they need another cash crop? In fact, canola has surpassed wheat in its value on the Prairies.

If the member is serious about debating, he should stop playing tricks with this and let us debate.

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today in the House as member of Parliament for LaSalle—Émard.

I would like to note that, since May 2, there have been many of these requests to limit debate. I remind my hon. government colleagues that as a member of Parliament elected by my constituents in LaSalle—Émard, I have just as much a right to be heard as members on the government side. Their recent requests limit my right to represent my constituents.

[English]

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I guess my argument would stand from the former questions. If those members are so concerned about having time to debate, why are we seeing silly motions to adjourn the debate which they supported? If they are really serious about moving forward and having a good fulsome debate, I am here and I am ready to do it. However, when we have to use valuable parliamentary time to come in and vote down a motion to adjourn the debate on the very first day of debate, and members scream that they want more debate, it is more than hypocritical.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find this disturbing. In my view, time allocation should be used for pressing issues of pan-Canadian interests. This appears to be a regional interest for western farmers.

The Wheat Board has been with us for 91 years. I could see a time allocation motion being worthy if there were unanimity among western farmers for the changes to the board, but from what I have heard in the House, even among western farmers there is not agreement about changes to the Canadian Wheat Board. Since there appears to be no unanimity in this region, why is the government trying to close debate at this time?

•(1015)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I am not sure where the member opposite gets the time of 91 years. I know that for a lot of us, it seems longer than that, but the reality is it was brought in as mandatory in 1943 under the War Measures Act.

I do agree with him that it is a regional interest, absolutely. That is why I find it almost untenable when all these members from outside western Canada preach to us and tell us how we should run our farming enterprises. I am a farmer myself, and there are a lot of farmers on the benches here that still have farming interests and still have families tilling the soil. They are all asking for a reasonable request, that they have the same rights and privileges as farmers in Ontario do. I do not think that is out of line at all.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I hope it is not the position of the government of the day that the only people who are allowed to have an opinion with respect to the Wheat Board are the people who agree with the government.

The fact of the matter is when the minister stands in his place and asserts that there is unanimity among western farmers with respect to the future of the Wheat Board, that is a preposterous statement.

Government Orders

I would hope that the minister would at least have the decency to recognize that western farmers themselves had a vote. They had a vote because the government was not willing to have a vote. They had a vote because the government was not willing to follow the law. We then have the Prime Minister of the country saying on October 7 in the *Globe and Mail*:

It's time for the wheat board and others who have been standing in the way to realize that this train is barreling down a prairie track.

What the government of the day is saying is that the Conservatives are going to railroad the western farmers. They are going to railroad anybody who does not agree with them, and they are going to railroad the House of Commons for the fourth time in 25 days.

That is what the government has become all about, a government that simply says, "It is our way or the railroad", and it is the railroad that it is driving and it is not—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will try to limit questions and comments to about a minute, because I see many people rising.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the main tenet of democracy is having one's say, not necessarily having one's way, no matter how loud one screams.

At the end of the day, even the Wheat Board admitted that the so-called plebiscite was a non-binding referendum.

Hon. Bob Rae: They had no choice.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Just a minute, Bob. Hang on. You had your turn.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I think the hon. minister knows that he should direct his comments through the chair.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: I am happy to do that, Madam Speaker. At least you are balanced.

The Wheat Board itself, in its spring edition that it puts out quarterly, did a non-binding referendum of farmers across western Canada, and when it offered the idea of a dual market, there was tremendous response for that. We will honour that as well.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Medicine Hat riding is a huge rural area. About half of the population is rural, and there are all types of farmers and products.

Could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell the House why we need to pass this legislation immediately for the benefit of funding for research in western Canada?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, innovation has been a main tenet of agriculture in western Canada. We have developed things like zero till and moved forward with a number of different entities in everything but the Wheat Board commodities.

Having said that, there has been a check off in place for years through the Wheat Board to fund valuable organizations like the Canadian International Grains Institute, the Western Grains Research Foundation and the Canadian Malting Barley Technical Centre, and we will continue to do that.

We will move to a point of sale, gathered in and administered by Agriculture Canada in the short term until we find someone to take over that valuable resource and asset.

There can never be enough funding for science and research. We will continue to do that check off and make sure the money flows to those organizations that do such a great job.

•(1020)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma-Manitoulin-Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a press release from Allen Oberg, chairman of the CWB governing board of directors. He said:

This is not about putting farmers in the drivers' seat—it's about throwing us under the bus, and handing the steering wheel to huge American and European multinationals that control the world's grain trade.

I am just wondering if the minister could answer two simple questions. Can he guarantee that farmers will not lose their land to big conglomerate? Can he confirm that they will be appointing their own appointees to the Wheat Board, as opposed to having the farmers themselves who have been doing this for years?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the exact purpose of this in the end is to have farmers take 100% control of this. That is why we are giving the new entity up to five years to adapt to and bring forward a program that puts farmers in the driver's seat, absolutely.

The problem that the Wheat Board is encountering is that it becomes a price taker. Over the last short time it has lost 50% of the wheat volume. It has lost 40% of the barley volume.

The quality consistency is still there because of the great job western Canadian farmers do, and in using entities like the Grain Commission for blending and so on. We are still putting out that top quality product. We need more of it, not less.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Madam Speaker, in Ontario there used to be a single-desk marketing agency through the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board. That board disappeared in 2003. That happened because of a democratic decision taken by the democratically elected board of directors of the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board who determined that was the route they wished to take.

In western Canada, there is also a duly elected board of directors for the Canadian Wheat Board. Why are the western directors not being treated with the same respect and regard as the directors of the Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board?

If the Ontario directors were allowed to take a democratic decision and go in a certain direction, why can the western directors not do the same thing?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, there is a major difference between what was governing the body in Ontario and what was governing the body in western Canada. It is called a piece of legislation. There was no Ontario Wheat Producers' Marketing Board legislation in the House even at the provincial level. However, there is one at the federal level. We seek to change that and allow farmers to work democratically to move forward and use or not use the board.

When farmers spoke out, the member opposite shackled and jailed them. He has absolutely no credibility on this issue.

Government Orders

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I ask the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food why in this discussion the government is not following the Canadian Wheat Board Act?

Section 47.1 guarantees farmers the right to vote on changes to the Canadian Wheat Board's marketing structure. Why is the minister not allowing farmers a say in the full dismantling being proposed? Why is the government refusing to listen to the voices of not just western farmers but also western Canadians who have spoken out in large numbers asking the government to protect the single desk system?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, anybody reading section 47.1 knows that is not exactly what it says. It calls for a vote of the affected producers if we are adding or subtracting a commodity from the board. We are not doing that. We are using democracy and the supremacy of Parliament to fundamentally change the act.

As significant moneys would be allotted to the port of Churchill, would the member for Churchill support the bill?

When we spent some \$30 million in budget 2008, she voted against it. I am not sure why she would continue to do that when she knows how valuable that port is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question for the minister. He said that the government can always use time allocation, when it is needed. But why is it necessary today to shut down debate on the Canadian Wheat Board? I sat with him when he was in opposition, when he was the chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. Since he became Minister of Agriculture, he has shown that he is able to defend and debate his point of view. He has even introduced bills to shut down the Canadian Wheat Board. So it is not that he is not capable of debating. It is because, since Parliament convened on May 2, this government has decided to bulldoze through everything. It no longer wants us to debate bills that it deems important. That is undemocratic.

What is the minister afraid of? Why does he not want to talk about this issue here, in the House, and let democracy do its job?

• (1025)

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska was a good colleague on the agriculture committee. We did some great work together.

The simple answer is timeliness. Markets and farmers themselves need clarity and certainty as to when this would move through. As the member is aware, farmers commence their farm inputs in the fall. They spread fertilizers and apply chemicals depending on the commodity they will seed in the spring.

Farmers need to know that what they will seed next spring will be theirs to market. We are putting a time allocation on this bill to ensure it is in effect by the end of this calendar year so that the industry and markets can adjust accordingly.

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Madam Speaker, one of the myths the opposition is perpetrating is that somehow the quality of our grain would decline without the Canadian Wheat Board

monopoly. Will the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food explain to the House why it is important that the legislation be passed immediately to assure our global customers that our grain will continue to be of the best quality?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, as the member for Palliser represents a huge rural riding in the Moose Jaw area, he is as concerned as I am about grain quality.

Quality is regulated by the Canadian Grain Commission. However, it is based on the great work our farmers do. Changes in weather, cropping and so on have allowed our farmers to adapt. They have done some great work with new varieties in canola and pulse crops. They have also been able to maintain that top quality wheat that is in such demand around the world. A good portion of the barley goes to malt, which is also in demand around the world.

We require more acres of new and better crop varieties. We will continue to do that.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister keeps referring to this side of the House as being full of hypocrisy.

I will quote several remarks made in the House on previous occasions by his leader.

On March 31, 2004, his leader said:

No real reform at committees, instead the same old games the government is playing with public accounts. The government invoked closure in the House after only six days.

I point out that we have only been debating the bill for a day and the government already is invoking closure.

There is no reform or election of Senators. He is driving opponents out of his party, appointing candidates and playing with the election date as a personal political football.

On October 1, 2002, his leader said:

The government has used closure and time allocation more frequently than any previous government.

The government has been using time allocation procedures a lot more. Why the hypocrisy?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, time allocation and closure are legitimate tools of a democracy. They are within the bounds of what we are allowed to do in this place.

In the case of this bill, it is a matter of timing. It is a matter of offering market certainty and clarity to the producers so they will know that what they are prepping for this fall and will be sowing in the spring will be theirs to sell.

They need to know that the markets will be adjusting. As well, the new entity of the Canadian Wheat Board will require time to forward hedge and contract to be the major player we know it can be. We look forward to that day.

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, this morning the minister spoke about people from the outside getting involved in this debate. I would like him to tell us exactly who these people from the outside are. Are they from the United States and Europe or are they from Quebec, Saskatchewan and other parts of Canada?

We are talking about democracy here. We have the right to speak, say what we are thinking and participate in the debate.

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I am happy to entertain that question on the merits of the debate.

I am concerned when I see that farmers in Ontario have rights and privileges that have been denied to farmers in western Canada. I am asking for fairness.

The Confederation of this country ensures that all provinces have a chance to succeed. We have certainly worked well with the province of Quebec over the last few years. It has more autonomy, as do other provinces. We have a tremendous relationship with some provinces. Three out of the four provinces involved in the Canadian Wheat Board issue are siding with us in this debate and I welcome that.

I welcome debating the points of the matter, not beating around the edges and wasting time.

• (1030)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my question for the minister is with regard to time allocation. What will it take to convince the government that this is not the direction it should be taking given the level of frustration being experienced today by prairie farmers regarding the government's actions?

One way prairie farmers can express their frustration is by opposition members articulating what has been discussed with them or what has been received from them in emails or telephone calls. By putting limitations on our ability to at least debate the issue, does the minister not recognize that he is adding to the frustration of the prairie farmers?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I live on the Prairies. I go home when I can, as do many of my colleagues.

The real frustration for prairie farmers is the unknown. They are asking for certainty and clarity so they will know how to market and what to grow next year.

I point out to the member opposite that it was his party that dragged us into an election last spring that was not required by the Canadian people. Canadians sent us back here with a clear majority and a mandate to move forward on issues exactly like this. That is why we are sitting over here and he is sitting over there.

When I look at the silly tricks the Liberals have been playing this last while on this issue I know they are not done. They have a quiverful and will play as many as they possibly can while at the same time saying we should get on with it.

I am happy to get on with it. I am here to debate.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, the Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers Act will enable the interim Canadian Wheat Board to act as a voluntary marketing organization through its transition to full private ownership.

During that orderly transition our government will provide the Canadian Wheat Board with the tools it needs to act as a voluntary pooling option for the farmers who choose to use it.

During the transition period our government will continue to guarantee the new Canadian Wheat Board's initial payments for borrowing, assist with funding for reorganization costs related to the removal of the monopoly and put in place a voluntary check-off to continue producer support for research and marketing development activities.

Today we are only a few hours into the debate and the opposition has introduced two motions to delay and stall the bill.

Would the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food explain to the House why it is important that the legislation be passed immediately to ensure the transition happens in an orderly fashion?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the member for Calgary Centre underscores the answer I have given many times. It is about clarity and certainty. It is about ensuring that farmers have the tools at their disposal to accentuate the bottom line of their businesses. Farming is now a big business. Even small farms operate as businesses. Some farmers have jobs off the farm and have moved to other commodities that are not under a single desk, such as livestock, pigs, chickens, et cetera. They also grow different grain commodities.

The member for Calgary Centre makes an excellent point as to why we need to get this done quickly. It is about timeliness. It is about ensuring that not only the markets have time to adjust but also to enable the new Canadian Wheat Board to forward contract and offer futures as soon as possible.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am gravely concerned about Canadian democracy. The government is trying to muzzle the media. The government is trying to muzzle the opposition and therefore the power of each member in the House. There are movements rising up around the globe to denounce this type of attitude, yet the government is moving in the opposite direction.

I am curious to know whether the minister and the government are advocates of democracy. If so, does the minister plan to change his position on this motion?

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I would say to the member opposite that the only thing gagging the media lately are the metaphors coming from the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Government Orders

We certainly believe in democracy. We campaigned hard on these types of issues. We came back here to fulfill those commitments and maintain the bond that we have with our constituents. We will get the legislation passed in a timely manner, ensure that farmers and markets have time to adjust and give them the signal to move forward and enhance their bottom lines.

•(1035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Madam Speaker, I find it hypocritical that this bill is called an Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board, when it is clearly intended to dismantle and destroy that board. Farmers get between \$4 billion and \$7 billion from this organization each year. This is no small issue. This is a very important organization, and we need to take time for discussion before we destroy it. I do not understand why the government is trying to muzzle the opposition. Earlier, my colleague mentioned that the government is trying to muzzle the opposition and keep information hush-hush.

I come from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, where agriculture is one of the main economic drivers. I have something to say about this. In my region, the UPA believes that the Canadian Wheat Board should exist. So my opinion should be heard in the House.

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board does not give farmers money. It markets the farmers' commodities.

The system works as follows. If I grow and harvest durum wheat and decide to sell it to a pasta maker on my own, I must phone the Wheat Board and inform it of that. It will tell me how much it will cost in freight and elevation to get it to Tidewater. I will send a cheque. I will phone the Wheat Board back to ask if I can sell the wheat. At that point it will inform me that it will cost me so much a bushel because that is the price it can get for it that day. Essentially, I must buy back the durum wheat which has not yet left my farm before I can finally do something with it. That has to change.

We cannot shackle people like that and expect them to stay in that kind of situation. The board was created in a different time for a different reason. We have moved beyond that.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, my question is—

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. I am not sure if you are aware but there are countless members of the Conservative caucus who want to ask questions. Several members on the other side have asked multiple questions. I believe it would be important to hear what the strong representatives of the Canadian wheat farmers have to say on this side of the House.

The Deputy Speaker: I appreciate the members' frustration, but they should recall that the Speaker stated before leaving the chair that as per the regulations and procedures, the purpose of this 30-minute question period is to allow the opposition to hold the government to account.

Members should recognize that I did allow three questions from the government side, which is similar in proportion to the time we allot during question period. I believe that is a fair allocation.

I will give the member 15 seconds to ask her question.

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Madam Speaker, just for our clarification, we have seen this happen, but we just do not seem to have your formula of how you figure out who is able to speak and who is not. Could you give us the actual numbers so we will time our standing up appropriately?

The Deputy Speaker: There is no formula. It is at the Speaker's discretion following the rules of procedure.

I will give the hon. member for Churchill 15 seconds to ask the last question.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I wish the members across would have the same interest in allowing farmers to speak out, not just their own caucus members but to allow farmers across western Canada to have a vote on whether they want this Wheat Board to be dismantled. The reason why the Conservatives are not allowing that vote is because we know from the plebiscite and from the farmers' voices that they support the single desk.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I pointed out earlier that a lot of the people sitting on this side of the House right now are actually farmers. They represent farmers. We were sent here with a mandate to change the single desk into a dual market situation and we will continue to do that whether we have help from the opposition or not.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith the question necessary to dispose of the motion now before the House.

[*English*]

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

•(1120)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 41)

YEAS
Members
Ablonczy
Adler
Albas
Adams
Aglukkaq
Albrecht

Government Orders

Alexander	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Atamanenko	Aubin
Allison	Amblar	Bélanger	Bellavance
Ambrose	Anders	Bennett	Benskin
Anderson	Ashfield	Bevington	Blanchette
Aspin	Baird	Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin
Bateman	Benoit	Borg	Boulerice
Bernier	Bezan	Brison'	Brosseau
Blaney	Block	Caron	Casey
Boughen	Braid	Chicoine	Choquette
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Christopherson	Cleary
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)	Coderre	Comartin
Bruinooge	Butt	Côté	Cuzner
Calandra	Calkins	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Cannan	Carmichael	Dewar	Dionne Labeille
Carrie	Chisu	Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Chong	Clarke	Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Clement	Daniel	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dussault
Davidson	Dechert	Eykling	Footc
Del Mastro	Devolin	Freeman	Fry
Dreeshen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Garneau	Garrison
Dykstra	Fantino	Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Fast	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Giguère	Goodale
Flaherty	Fletcher	Gravelle	Groguhé
Galipeau	Gallant	Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Gill	Glover	Hsu	Hughes
Goguen	Goldring	Hyer	Jacob
Goodyear	Gosal	Julian	Karygiannis
Gourde	Grewal	Kellway	Lamoureux
Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Larose	Latendresse
Hawn	Hayes	Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
Hiebert	Hoback	LéBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Hoepner	Hoder	Liu	MacAulay
James	Jean	Mai	Marston
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Martin	Masse
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kerr	Mathyssen	May
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	McCallum	McGuinty
Lake	Lauzon	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Lebel	Leaf	Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue)	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Leitch	Lemieux	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Leung	Lizon	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Lobb	Lukiwski	Nantel	Nash
Lumney	MacKay (Central Nova)	Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
MacKenzie	McLeod	Pacetti	Papillon
Menegakis	Menzies	Patry	Péclét
Merrifield	Miller	Perreault	Pilon
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)		Plamondon	Quach
Moore (Fundy Royal)		Rac	Rafferty
Nicholson	Norlock	Ravignat	Raynauld
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon	Regan	Rousseau
Obhrai	Oda	Saganash	Sandhu
Opitz	Paradis	Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Payne	Penashue	Sellah	Sgro
Poirievre	Preston	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Raitt	Rajotte	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	
Rathgeber	Reid	Sitsabaiesan	St-Denis
Rempel	Rickford	Stewart	Stoffer
Ritz	Saxton	Sullivan	Thibeault
Schellenberger	Seeback	Toone	Tremblay
Shea	Shipley	Trudeau	Turmel
Shory	Smith	Valerio— 121	
Sopuck	Sorenson		
Stanton	Storseth		
Strahl	Sweet		
Tilson	Toet		
Toews	Trost		
Trottier	Truppe		
Tweed	Uppal		
Valcourt	Van Kesteren		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Wallace	Warawa		
Warkentin	Watson		
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)			
Weston (Saint John)			
Wilks	Williamson		
Wong	Woodworth		
Yelich	Young (Oakville)		
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 156		

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)
AngusAndrews
Ashton**PAIRED**

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[English]

I wish to inform the House that because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

SECOND READING

The House resumed from October 19 consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Government Orders

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Churchill has 10 minutes left to conclude her speech.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand here today in some great irony. Today is the birthdate of Tommy Douglas. Tommy Douglas was a champion of much of what we call Canadian values today. He led Saskatchewan from some of its darkest days to some of its brightest days. He was somebody who fought for public medicare at the national level, somebody who created much of the Canadian identity that we have today.

But Tommy Douglas also did one more thing. He stood up for rural Canada. He stood up for the farmers whose communities had been impacted by the Great Depression. He stood up for the development of those communities and those regions. He stood up for their voices.

Today, so many years later, on the day of his birthday, we are entering into a historic debate. We have all been plunged into this debate by the Conservative government's ideological agenda to oppose farmers' voices, to oppose the messages we have heard from farmers in farming communities and rural communities in western Canada, the very part of the country that Tommy Douglas came from.

The loss of the Wheat Board is a loss for all of us across this country. Today's debate also amplifies the fact that the government's agenda is not just about the dismantling of the Wheat Board, but about the silencing of our voices.

Just some short weeks ago, the results of a plebiscite administered by the Canadian Wheat Board came out. That plebiscite showed that a majority of Canadian western farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta believe that the single desk ought to be maintained. The government not only ignored that plebiscite but is also ignoring section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which states that farmers must have a say in any proposed plans to alter the operation of the Wheat Board.

Today is a dark day, given that we are not just hearing about the government's plan to dismantle a successful institution that has supported the livelihoods of so many farmers and so many rural communities across western Canada, but that once again the government is not allowing westerners to have their voices heard through our Canadian democracy.

Today I also stand as the member of Parliament for Churchill. I stand here proud to represent the community of Churchill. It is an important part of our Canadian economy and also a critical part of our movement forward.

As the only deepwater Arctic seaport, Churchill holds a bright future for the kind of development we could see in northern Canada. Yes, there was an announcement in terms of investment, but many of us know that much of that announcement is both highly speculative and extremely short term. While Churchill and the north welcome investment, more than anything we would welcome the assurance that we can work with institutions that have successfully worked with us to provide a livelihood to the people in our communities.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the only agricultural shipper to the Port of Churchill. Wheat Board shipments account for 95% of the cargo that goes through Churchill. The Port of Churchill is the

closest port to many Canadian farmers in the west, and as a result, it saves farmers millions of dollars in shipping. The port depends on farmers as much as farmers depend on the port.

While the government announced adjustment funding for the Port of Churchill, it is speculative. A cost-benefit analysis has not been done as the government has pursued its steadfast approach, its ideological approach, to dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board. The government's actions do not make sense for Churchill. They do not make sense for Manitoba or western Canada.

• (1125)

What will the Port of Churchill do when this adjustment funding runs out and big agri ships to their own terminals in the east and the west to maximize the revenue? What will happen to the port, a port that some have referred to as a jewel of the north, a port that is a critical link in the endless development that we could see in northern Canada, further north than we are?

All in all, the implications of dismantling the single desk are profound. Despite a clear message from western farmers to keep the Wheat Board, the government continues to display arrogance in failing to listen to the voices of farmers. The National Farmers Union president, Terry Boehm, said that the plebiscite's message was crystal clear. Perhaps the government has trouble interpreting these numbers. The facts are that out of the roughly 38,000 votes that came in, almost 23,000, or 62% of farmers, agreed with the statement "I wish to maintain the ability to market all wheat through the Canadian Wheat Board single desk system".

That is crystal clear. Farmers voted in the plebiscite to say that they want the Government of Canada to stand up for the single desk.

Alberta farmer Ken Larsen, from Benalto, Alberta, a supporter of the Canadian Wheat Board and a full-time farmer, said of the vote "that farmers voting in such high numbers is a strong message in itself", given what he called "an ongoing campaign of misinformation and bullying".

The government has no mandate to go against the wishes of prairie farmers and to meddle in this system. The Wheat Board is controlled, operated and funded by farmers for farmers.

The Wheat Board offers a number of advantages to wheat farmers. The first is price pooling, which insulates farmers from abrupt shifts in price and passes returns back to these farmers.

Government Orders

Producer car loading sites are an important piece of this puzzle. The car loading sites that the Wheat Board includes as part of its system save the farmers money, but if the single desk goes, so will the producer car loading sites. These producer cars mean farmers can bypass grain companies' elevators and save themselves \$1,000 to \$1,500 per car that is shipped. The producer cars are branch lines and short-line railroads. What will happen to them and to the communities along these rail lines?

To connect to the reality of Churchill, as the Port of Churchill is threatened, so is the Bay line that connects Gillam, Ilford, War Lake, Thicket Portage, Pikwitonei, Thompson, Wabowden, The Pas. These are communities all across Manitoba. Some have an agricultural connection, but some depend on the rail line that makes its money from the kind of cargo that the Wheat Board has shipped to the Port of Churchill.

Dismantling the Wheat Board is a slap in the face for western farmers, to their jobs and to their economy. During tough economic times and when prices fall, farmers will be left without any marketing agency to provide them with free risk management and market power.

The government's actions are an attack on the family farm that has supported the Canadian economy for decades. Mark Sandilands, of Lethbridge, put it well when he said, "Farms will have to grow bigger; there'll be fewer small and medium farming operations, and the loss of small rural communities, with their schools, hospitals, community centres and other services. One could drive through rural Canada and find virtually no inhabitants".

I stand here today not just as the MP for Churchill but as a proud member of the NDP team that has a history of standing up for prairie people and a history of standing up for the voices of people who want to have a say in what they produce, in the future of their communities and in the well-being of our country.

Today on October 20, I ask that we all think of Tommy Douglas, our greatest Canadian, a great leader who stood up for the very ideas that we are fighting for today.

• (1130)

Let the farmers vote. Let western Canadians hear. Let us save the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned that today is October 20. It happens to be my birthday today, and I could not ask for anything better than to give our western Canadian farmers marketing freedom.

I would like to ask the hon. member across the way if she supports jailing Canadian wheat farmers for wanting to sell their products across our borders. She speaks of democracy. Does she think it is okay for Canadian farmers to go to jail for selling their grain?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, first I will wish my colleague across the way a great happy birthday. Perhaps it is an honour for all those celebrating today to have a birthday on the same day as Tommy Douglas, a great leader in Canadian history.

I hear the very common reference to the word "freedom". To me and certainly for us living in the west, "freedom" also means the

freedom to speak, the freedom to be heard, the freedom to have a vote on whether people want the single desk to be maintained.

To return the question, I would like to ask this government why it is so afraid to give farmers the freedom to have their voices heard. Maybe it is because in the plebiscite it saw that the farmers want to keep the single desk.

• (1135)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague made reference to the sacrifices that would be made in the Port of Churchill.

Recently an article that appeared in *The Economist* warned of the tragic closure of very many farms and the consequence that would have on local small-town economies in our western provinces. Such closures would change their entire way of life and their entire culture.

Would the member comment on her observations and her fears of these consequences?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, that is what this debate on keeping the Canadian Wheat Board is about. It is about farming and farmers, but it is also about the well-being of rural communities.

I find it pretty ironic that the government refers to its representation of rural Canada when, step by step, it seeks to dismantle the very structures that keep livelihoods in our rural communities and that allow farmers and their families to survive in rural communities. We already know how difficult it is for farmers and the family farm in this day and age. However, as we connect the reality of the Wheat Board with a farm in southern Saskatchewan or northern Alberta to the survival of the Port of Churchill, we also understand that the Wheat Board stood up for all of us. It supported our communities in the work that we do, whether we are farming, northern or western communities. That is why we would like to see the government show some leadership to support rural Canada.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank my hon. colleague for reminding us of the importance of Tommy Douglas' birthday. When we think of this great Canadian and his birthday, the cynicism of today's debate on the Canadian Wheat Board is even more striking. I heard someone say that the survey in question, which our Conservative friends continue to ridicule, was at least honest enough to show a very clear vote on wheat and a much closer vote—51% or 52% I think—on another grain.

I wonder if our colleague could elaborate a little for us. Just how credible was that plebiscite?

Government Orders

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for this very important question. The results of the Wheat Board's plebiscite showed that a majority of farmers support the continued existence of the board, not only for wheat, but also for barley. The government is ignoring those results and, on top of that, is defying the act that created the Canadian Wheat Board, which stipulates that any proposed changes to the institution or the process must be voted on by farmers after they have been consulted. Once again, this government is showing complete disrespect for western farmers and for democracy.

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have a brief question for the member opposite. She talks a lot about democracy and the need for us to listen to farmers, and so on. How would she explain that the governments of Saskatchewan and Alberta support the legislation before the House? Do they not also represent their farmers?

• (1140)

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I am proud to come from a province that has a strong NDP government, one that was re-elected to its fourth term majority, with a pro single desk stance. That pro single desk stance came from consulting with farmers on the ground, a majority of whom time and time again voted for directors, who are pro single desk, to represent them on the Canadian Wheat Board.

I would ask that the federal government follow the Canadian Wheat Board Act and consult with farmers directly, who we know have the most to lose with the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board. Who is going to gain? It is big agriculture, such as Cargill and Viterra. Corporations will certainly be benefiting from the government's actions.

Why is the government standing up for the corporations instead of western farmers?

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am a farmer. I know what will happen with the Canadian Wheat Board and I am concerned about what will happen to other marketing boards. This is a slippery slope.

Yesterday the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board said, "we want to provide the same freedom for farmers right across the country".

My question for the hon. member is this. Does she see the slippery slope that is happening today with the Canadian Wheat Board? Are chickens and milk next? What is happening with the government? It does not believe in boards. I hope farmers across the country are watching this slippery slope because other boards are next. What comments does the hon. member have on that?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, absolutely, it is a slippery slope. We are seeing a continuation of the ideological agenda to put corporations ahead of farmers and their communities, which produce the most important thing we need, and that is nourishment. Knowing who is producing our wheat and providing our economy with dairy products and livestock is what we are talking about today.

There is a great concern by farmers across our country, especially in Quebec where supply management is such a critical part of its economy. We hear the government talk about the importance of the

agricultural economy, but in fact it stands up for large corporations and kills the very institutions that allow farmers in whatever sectors to flourish, although in this case it is the wheat and the grain sector predominantly. It puts their livelihoods at much greater risk of being lost.

That is not the way we will move forward to build a better Canada. That is not the way we will build better rural communities. If anything, we are taking away the foundations on which our rural communities are built. We are taking away the economy on which our rural communities are built. We are providing an incentive for a generation of young people, like myself, to leave the industry.

If this is the way the government feels Canada will move forward, we in the NDP and, I might assume, based on this discussion, opposition parties do not think that is the kind of Canada we see moving forward. We will stand up for Canadian producers and farmers every step of the way.

Mr. Brian Storseth (Westlock—St. Paul, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is good to see you in the chair once again.

I would like to thank my staff and friends who helped me put this speech together, which I am about butcher. Also, I would like to thank a few members of this chamber and former members, as we are discussing a very important topic to western Canadian farm families.

First, I thank Rick Casson, the former member of Parliament from Lethbridge. He is a good friend of mine and a mentor who fought hard on this for many years.

I also thank the following current members: the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, the parliamentary secretary, who has been a staunch advocate of freedom for farmers for as long as I have been here; the member of Parliament for Vegreville—Wainwright, when he is not out there going after gophers, he has always been a staunch advocate of freedom; the member of Parliament for Selkirk—Interlake; and the member of Parliament for Crowfoot.

We are very fortunate on this side of the House to have such institutional knowledge of not only men and women who have farmed and lived under the tyranny of the Canadian Wheat Board, but who have also taken time out of their lives for public service, to come here and do the right thing and provide marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers.

I also thank some of our new members of Parliament who have buoyed us in the last Parliament. They bring to the team a fresh sense of needing to get the job done and a lot of enthusiasm. We have the member for Prince George—Peace River, a refreshing change from the last member of Parliament from Prince George, as well as the member of Parliament for Prince Albert.

Government Orders

Now that my thanks are done, I would like to talk about something that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food first brought to my attention with his private member's bill back in 2006, when I first was elected. That was the issue of the buyback. I went to the minister, who was the chair of the agriculture committee at the time, and asked why he felt this was the road we need to take.

When we go through all the processes and steps, we see that our western Canadian farmers do not have the ability to maximize their return on profit like any other businessman would have, and that is really unbelievable. Most people who do not live under the Wheat Board tyranny do not understand what it is like to have to put all that risk out there and not be able to get the same return on investment that others in other parts of our country can have.

I would also like to address, as we are kind of doing a little housekeeping, my dismay. This has been a top-of-mind issue to western Canadians for as long as I can remember and certainly for as long as I have been in politics, which has been over a decade. All they want is to be treated equally and fairly. At the end of the day, when we finally get the opportunity to put a bill forward and have serious debate, what are Canadians given to watch in the House of Commons? Parliamentary games.

The opposition, the NDP and Liberals both, is guilty of trying to delay, to filibuster. Then, when they do not like that, they want to move on and not have debate on it. This is not just my word, this is what those members have been doing. This is what they did last night and this is what they are attempting to do once again today.

When issues of this great a nature come before our country, before our Parliament, all parliamentarians should give the respect that is due and have a proper ideological, practical debate. I am more than happy to have that debate with the member of Parliament for Churchill or anybody who would like to discuss the issues of the Canadian Wheat Board and the positive effects that our government has had on that region.

It is very troubling for me to sit and listen to a member of Parliament, not only from the prairie region but from Churchill, a port that is getting a lot of support from our government, sit here and say that this is the wrong thing to do when her own mayor supports our government's position.

There has been a lot of talk about polls and plebiscites. Let me be frank, anybody can turn numbers to look any which way they want, but numbers tough to sway are the economic impacts on our communities, the economic impact on my home province and home town.

• (1145)

The June 2008 Informa report shows its assessment of the monopoly versus not having a monopoly on the Canadian Wheat Board. It should be pointed out that this is what we are talking about here. Everyone on the other side continues to misconstrue this as being an attack on the destruction of the Canadian Wheat Board. This is not about that. This is about ending a monopolistic system and opening up marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers.

The June 2008 report clearly demonstrates that the economic impact on western Canada will be between \$450 million a year and \$628 million a year. That is a lot of money. This is not money that

has to flow through some government program before it gets to my farmers so they get 70% of the cut that the government was supposed to give them. This is direct money, taken out of their pocket every year by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Some hon. member: Shameful.

Mr. Brian Storseth: It is absolutely shameful. From a low of \$13.72 per ton on feed barley in the five year reporting period to a high of \$47.57 per ton on durum, this would have had a tremendous impact on my farmers. That is not money they can get back. That is money that has been taken away from them.

What we can do now is look forward and ensure that they do not have that money taken out of their pockets any longer. That is what we are talking about today.

The other thing I would like to briefly touch on is Westlock Terminals. I am very proud of this new generation co-op that is in my riding. This is a co-operative of community members who have come together and taken on this terminal. They are doing a wonderful job in ensuring it is profitable and is servicing our farmers well.

I have sat down with them on several occasions, and they had some concerns when we first started down this road. They heard that we were going to end the monopoly. They definitely had some concerns because the other side was ramping up the fear campaign. They were already calling them and telling them that the world was going to end for them.

As the minister has said, and I believe the terminal now realizes, "The sky is not falling". The sky is actually the limit for our farmers moving forward, and for Westlock Terminals and other co-ops like that.

This is a time, moving forward, when we are going to have innovation and ingenuity on the Prairies. This is a region of the country that has been the economic engine in the country for the last decade. The one area that continually lapses behind has been on the agricultural front, particularly when it comes to wheat and barley. In my opinion, it lags behind because of the monopoly, and the Informa report clearly shows that.

As I rise in this chamber to speak on marketing freedom, it will shock many who are not familiar with this issue to know that in our great country we have had two distinct classes of grain framers: those who live under the oppression of the Canadian Wheat Board and are not allowed to produce and sell their own wheat and barley; and the rest of Canada that has complete marketing freedom, the freedom to maximize their profits and sell their property as they see fit.

As we go through this vigorous debate over the next couple of months, time and time again we will see urban members of Parliament, oftentimes representing people who do not fall under the tyranny of the Wheat Board, standing and arguing for the status quo.

Let us be clear. These members are arguing for a two-tiered system. They are arguing for a system, so that my family in Alberta should not be able to sell its own wheat and barley crops as it sees fit. However, my family members in Ontario and other parts of the country have that freedom. It is absolutely two distinct classes.

Government Orders

It is past time that we take the shackles off of western Canadian farmers. The status quo simply is not working. We need to allow farmers to farm the marketplace and not rely on the benevolence of government or its organizations. We have the best and brightest producers in the world.

• (1150)

This brings me to the Bauer family in Fort Hills, Alberta. This is a young family with two young daughters. They earn their living on grain and oil seed production.

At the beginning of every year, and this should be particularly interesting for some of our colleagues who are not familiar with agriculture, they put \$400,000, \$500,000 worth of inputs into the ground. That is the cost of a very nice home right here in Ottawa and across our country.

Each year they take that risk capital and put it into the ground. They pray for some spring rain. They hope that they can get the proper sun amounts throughout the year. During the summer, they honestly just hope they do not get hailed out. As their crop starts to come up, they have to put more fertilizer and more pesticides. They have to ensure the grasshoppers will not get it.

In the fall, in September, October, while everything looks good and they have their entire life savings out on the fields, they have to hope for the good graces of God to get enough good days before the heavy frost and the snow to get their crops off the field.

When they have done all of this, worked countless days and sleepless nights, they have to accept a lower price on their commodity, on their crop, because they live in western Canada, and that is simply not acceptable.

The Bauer family should have the same right as their cousins in Ontario to maximum their rate of return so that they do not have to rely on the government, so that they can put money away for their children's education, and for the new renovations to their home. That is what we are talking about here today.

When we talk about younger farmers and trying to get younger farmers into farming, this is a big hurdle. They are very intelligent. They look at the business model and say, "Why on earth would I want to get into something where the government restricts what my profit can be?" Sometimes \$450 million to \$628 million a year is a lot of money to be taken out of an economy in the designated areas.

What have they done? They have turned to other crops. Quite frankly, they have turned to canola and many other options, so that they do not have the shackles holding them back.

This has been positive for the last several years in western Canada. Canola has been a good crop, but when we are talking about feeding the world and making sure, as the opposition likes to do, that people in Africa and people around the world, who are starving, have enough food and relying on Canadian exports, we cannot feed them with canola. We need to send them our grains and oil seeds that they can utilize.

It is projected that in 2020 there will be seven billion people in the world. That is up from about 6.2 billion people today. That is an 800 million person increase over the next eight years.

The good news is that when my grandfather was farming his quarter section of land up in Fort Assiniboine 40 or 50 years ago, he could only feed five, ten people off his farm. Really, individuals can feed their family and a little bit more to trade off and get some other stuff.

Now, the Bauer family can feed 120 to 150 people off of their farm. The ingenuity in Canadian agriculture over the last 50 years has been amazing. The product increase has been amazing. The problem that we have in meeting the world demand is simply the fact that these guys are not willing to take a loss or not maximize their profit, so they are not dealing with board products as often as they used to, which affects the amount of global export that we give to other countries.

Those are just a couple of the issues for young farmers taking on farming in the future, especially with the Canadian Wheat Board. Hon. members need not take my word for it. They can actually look at the Canadian Wheat Board's 2011 producer survey that found 76% of younger generation farmers surveyed by the Wheat Board itself want something other than the status quo monopoly.

This is an amazing figure. This is not a figure that the Conservative Party came up with. This is a figure from the Wheat Board itself.

• (1155)

Another issue I would like to address is innovation in agriculture and the business model. It is important to make clear to those who may not understand how agriculture works that farmers themselves are businesses.

Gregg Adair and his family farm 3,000 or 4,000 acres. I was actually out in their fields this year. I hope everything continued to go well. When I spoke with Gregg, he said, "You know, Brian, I know exactly how much inputs I have, right to the acre; I know exactly how much I need to get in return for my product; and I know exactly how much loss I'm able to take".

However, what he cannot calculate is what he is going to get out of the Wheat Board at the end of the day because what he does know is that he is not going to get the price he should get. He is going to take a lesser value on any wheat and barley that needs to go through the Canadian Wheat Board.

He also, because of the Wheat Board's restrictions on seed, does not have the ability to even utilize some of the Canadian seed and genetics that we have produced in our own country. The Wheat Board does not allow him to do that. Is that not amazing? The Wheat Board actually restricts Canadian technology. Who is using it instead of the Adair family in Westlock? Farmers in the United States are benefiting from our research and development.

These are just some of the many issues that we experience in western Canada. The fundamental difference here is these are not things that are encountered in the rest of the country. It is not fair for us to have two totally different classes of grain farmers.

Government Orders

In conclusion, I would just like to say that farm families across the Prairies are watching us today. They are hoping and praying that their government will stand up for them and fulfill the promise that we had made to provide them with marketing freedom. My farmers are not asking for special treatment. They are not asking for something that the rest of the country does not already have. They are simply asking to be treated as an equal with their cousins in Ontario and the rest of Canada.

Marketing freedom is a first but very important step in maintaining and encouraging young farmers to enter and stay in our agriculture sector.

This is not an issue of left or right. This is not an issue of blue or orange. This is an issue of equality and fairness. It is an issue of right and wrong.

I ask all members of Parliament when the time comes to please seriously consider their vote on this, to consider what their vote will do to western Canadian farmers. I ask all members to support our farmers and our farm families on the Prairies. Thanks and God bless.

• (1200)

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to rise here today.

I am speaking not only as the member of Parliament for LaSalle—Émard, but also as an agronomist and someone who is passionate about agriculture. I would like to ask the hon. member what the consequences of this bill will be. The Canadian Wheat Board was created by farmers. They came together specifically to be able to provide a counterweight to large agri-food businesses. Over the past few years, we have seen a concentration of agriculture and agribusiness in the hands of large corporations and multinationals.

I wonder if the member who just spoke could tell us what he predicts for the future of Canadian farmers and for the Canadian institutions that help our farmers in that regard. I wonder if he could talk a little about the future.

[English]

Mr. Brian Storseth: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for the very respectful question.

Unfortunately, the very premise of the question which she asked is flawed because western Canadian farmers were never asked if they wanted to be a part of the Canadian Wheat Board. Seventy-six years ago, the Government of Canada decided it was what was best for the country and for Europe, at the time.

This was not a bunch of farmers getting together and saying that they needed a co-operative to fight the multinationals because around 1943 that was not an overwhelming concern.

However, today, when my farmers in Westlock get together with Westlock Terminals, they are looking forward to the future; they are looking forward to all the opportunities that are out there; and they are hoping that they can get the same opportunities with wheat and barley as they get with canola.

She does not have to take my word for it. Look at the numbers on the canola acreage over the last decade. There is a reason why

farmers are planting more and more canola and less and less wheat and barley. It is imperative that we ensure we look to the future, as the member said, and it is imperative that we allow our younger farmers to have the same access with wheat and barley as they do with canola.

• (1205)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my friend spoke of the perceived tyranny of the Canadian Wheat Board and I would suggest that the tyranny that we have to fear is the tyranny of the government. Subsection 47(1) requires a plebiscite that the government refuses to hold.

The Economist writes of the many farms that will be closing and the negative effect it will have on the economies of small towns in the prairie provinces. With all the changes that are about to occur, what consideration has the member given to all of those small communities which will now suffer because of the closure of small farms?

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, I am from a small rural community and I still live in one. I have a little better idea of what small rural communities and agriculture producers have been going through in the Prairies over the last decade and the decade before than under Liberal rule than the member of Parliament for Guelph does.

With all due respect, he has the absolute right to ask the question, but he talks about tyranny of this government. I will tell members what western Canadian farmers think was tyranny. It was when the member for Wascana locked up 12 farmers for trying to sell their own product. That was tyranny. That was heavy-handedness of the Liberal government. It was not acceptable then; it is not acceptable now. Our party has always listened to western Canadian farmers. We have many of them here with us.

An hon. member: Why are you afraid to have a vote?

Mr. Brian Storseth: The other thing I would like to say to my hon. colleague, as he heckles me, is the fact that the family farms are getting bigger and more and more farms have been shutting down because of the problem of the Wheat Board and other monopolies that exist in the agricultural sector. We are here to help resolve those issues.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me welcome my colleague on behalf of his constituents to marketing freedom for farmers that we enjoy in Ontario. I have a great agricultural riding with about \$1 billion a year in GDP for the farmers of Essex and they love their marketing choice. Some will choose the marketing agencies and others love to market directly to end users and middlemen.

The hon. member has made a great intervention so far. Can he explain the restrictions that western producers face as opposed to farmers in my riding in Essex, Ontario?

Government Orders

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the welcome to marketing freedom. We are not quite there yet. We still have a group of people who are trying to keep farmers back and hold their heads under water, but we are going to ensure that does not happen.

My hon. colleague brings up a good point and that is the point members on the other side say which is that it is the destruction of the Canadian Wheat Board. It is important that we make this crystal clear to western Canadian farmers. There will still be a pooling agency for them to use just the same as our farmers in Ontario have. It is called marketing freedom for a reason. We are not taking anything away from them, we are just giving them more choices and more options.

As I emphasized in my speech today, it is particularly younger farmers who look forward to this.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I hear from prairie farmers on both sides of this issue and it is fair to say there are prairie farmers on both sides of this issue. The ones I am hearing from primarily are concerned that the smaller farmers will be less able to manage without the single desk and they do want the plebiscite.

I am concerned that farms will go out of business and that main street small town businesses will be disadvantaged. I am wondering if there are some studies to which the hon. member can direct us that speak to the issue of the economic negative consequences of this legislation.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, western Canadian and small farmers already market their own products such as canola where the acreage for products like it is shooting through the roof. They have to market that on their own. There is not going to be a change there. They will also still have the opportunity of the pooling agency if they want. If anything, this is going to be an advantage because the pooling agency is going to be using farmers' money for what it is supposed to be used for. I am hopeful for less bureaucracy and less money being taken out of our farmers' pockets.

I focused my comments today on younger farmers in particular, many of whom are my friends in western Canada and they are looking forward to this because they are already marketing their own product. As the document I referred to from June 2008 shows, \$450 million to \$628 million a year more, and that was a few years ago, in the pockets of farmers is a significant increase of direct capital injection into their operations.

• (1210)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill Gehl, the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board, has said that one of the faults with the legislation is that the government would clearly not be supporting the port of Churchill even though the government says it is. The Canadian Wheat Board moves 600,000 tonnes a year through the port. The government was going to put in \$5 million. The \$5 million the government was going to put in over the next four or five years would not work out to very many dollars per tonne. There is no guarantee for these farmers at the end of the day.

The minister did not answer my question. I would like my colleague to tell me whether or not the government can guarantee that these farmers will not lose their farms to the big conglomerates.

Mr. Brian Storseth: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague, although with the best of intentions, has epitomized the problem we have with this debate raging today in the House of Commons.

The individual that she spoke of is not the chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board. Allen Oberg is the chairman. Mr. Gehl is the chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance. The member does not even have her sources correct and I cannot blame her, because she is not from there and does not necessarily interact with those guys and the agencies and farmers on a daily basis. She has to make sure that she does the proper research and homework so that we can have a fruitful debate.

Western Canadian farm families, not just farmers, the families, the children who are dependent on the farms, like the Bauers, are demanding that our government fulfill the promise we made to them so that they can have marketing freedom and be able to put more money back in their own pockets.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I had understood that a Conservative was going to rise and speak at this point but after hearing the force of the arguments from this side of the House, I guess the Conservatives have decided not to participate in the debate. I think that is very welcome.

I heard some of the comments the Conservatives were making earlier. I will start at that point because the government's tendency has been to constantly, significantly and regularly divide one Canadian from another, one region from another, one type of Canadian from another. That was not the Conservatives' hallmark before the election campaign. Members will remember they were wearing sweater vests and saying they were going to be a moderate government. One of their commitments during that so-called moderate time was to keep the Wheat Board.

However, since the election, the Conservatives have taken off the sweater vests and they have become incredibly intransigent and ideological in the kinds of things they are bringing forward in the House. One thing which clearly indicates that shift to fight for a radical right-wing politics privatization agenda is what the Conservatives are looking to do with the Wheat Board. Marketing choice, what a crock.

The farmers in western Canada voted 62% to retain the single desk on wheat and the government says it is going to run roughshod over those western farmers. On this side of the House, the NDP caucus is saying we are going to stand up for that 62% of western farmers and we are going to say no to this bill.

The other aspect that has been brought forward by members of the Conservative Party is that somehow the Canadian Wheat Board will continue. When we read through Bill C-18, we see the parts that deal directly with the dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board. The Conservatives will say it is not their plan for the moment, but we know the intent is to remove what has been a mainstay for western farmers for generations.

Government Orders

I come from British Columbia and have been part of what we have seen in western Canada over generations, and it is fair to say that we have often seen governments in Ottawa neglect or not address western Canadian concerns. It is particularly surprising to me that we see the government putting ideology over what should be a significant effort to listen to what western farmers have had to say about the Wheat Board and to look at the significant economic benefit that western farmers get from the Canadian Wheat Board.

When farmers in western Canada in a plebiscite vote significantly, a strong majority of 62%, and say they want to retain the single desk for wheat, why would a government then say that farmers' opinions are not important and that how they voted is not something the government is going to consider?

It is clear to us on this side of the House that the Conservatives are not willing to listen to western farmers. They are not willing to allow western wheat farmers and barley farmers to vote or consult on this issue. As the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Hull—Aylmer, said yesterday in the House, the Conservatives are breaking the laws that say the Wheat Board needs to have consultations with farmers and to have that vote from farmers before the government can proceed. The government is choosing not to do that and is running roughshod.

Worse, we are now seeing closure being brought in on this debate. After one day of discussion, the Conservatives realize they are losing this debate, that they do not have substantive facts to bring forward and they do not even have a business plan. They have not done an impact study. They have done nothing except rely on their base ideological beliefs.

• (1215)

After only one day of debate, the government found it had increasing difficulty making its views known, so it brought in closure. It is running roughshod. Not only is it saying that it will break the law and run roughshod over the clearly expressed opinions of western farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba, 62% of whom are saying yes to the Canadian Wheat Board and the single desk, it is now saying it does not want this debate to get out. The government does not want to hear from the public. It does not want the public to have time to react to this. It does not want democracy to have its place. The government certainly does not want to consult with western farmers because they will reject what it is putting forward, so it is going to use a sledgehammer and shut down Parliament.

It is fair to say that if the government has its way, for many years to come people in western Canada will remember how the Conservative government decided to run roughshod over western Canadians through these actions. The NDP will continue to speak for western farmers and all western Canadians and bring their point of view to the House of Commons because we understand this is a fundamental debate.

It is not just the fact that the plebiscite showed very clearly that 62% of western farmers wanted to keep the single desk, it is also the fact that Conservative MPs actively campaigned to gut the democratically elected members of the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. Year after year there continues to be a strong majority of western farmers who support the Wheat Board. We are

not talking about one single plebiscite or referendum that the government is ignoring. Despite the keenest, most base ideological attempt to gut the Canadian Wheat Board, western farmers said no time after time. They elected a majority of members on the board of directors who support the CWB.

What we are talking about is a systematic pattern of arrogance, of running roughshod and trampling on western farmers, despite the fact that they have clearly expressed their support for the Canadian Wheat Board time and time again. Why is that? I know you do not come from western Canada, Mr. Speaker, but you can certainly understand that historically western farmers were cast adrift by Ottawa with the policies of former Conservative and Liberal governments time and time again. Western farmers had to organize. They had to push.

Western Canadians generally have had to push for things that were often of benefit to the entire country as well. We will recall, of course, that the federal Parliament refused to have anything to do with public health care. It was a western Canadian and a freely and democratically elected administration under the direction of Tommy Douglas in Saskatchewan that established public health care in this country and now all Canadians enjoy it.

Western Canadian innovations include a lot of other things. As we well know, the co-operative movement particularly in the agricultural sector was born and prospered in western Canada, as well as the credit union movement. It is very popular in Quebec through the caisses populaires, but its strongest area is in western Canada. The co-operative wheat pools were brought together by farmers. It was Canadian farmers saying they needed this kind of single desk that led to the actions a few generations ago to establish the Canadian Wheat Board.

Why did farmers want that? Why have farmers continued to support it year after year despite the actions of the Conservative Party in opposition and now the Conservative Party in government trying to beat them back with a sledgehammer saying that they are wrong and the government is right? A few folks in Ottawa are saying western farmers are wrong and the government is right. Why have farmers supported the Canadian Wheat Board year after year? It is very simple. The reasons are economic.

• (1220)

We can see what the economic basis has been for the Wheat Board. We can compare the economic indices of western farmers with those of areas that do not have a wheat board at all, such as the United States, or have done away with their wheat board, and the member for Winnipeg Centre was very passionate about what happened in Australia.

When we see the economic utility of the Wheat Board, we can then understand why western farmers, despite the most mean-spirited pressure from the government in a constant and ongoing way, have continued to support the Wheat Board year after year and generation after generation. No mean-spirited ideological attack by the Conservative government, which is taking off the sweater vest and getting down to a very mean-spirited divisive business, is going to change the fact that the economic realities have been good for western farmers.

Government Orders

If we compare the Wheat Board and the single desk marketing power that western farmers have with what happened in Australia and what continues to exist in the United States, we see a profound economic benefit from the Wheat Board in the same way as we do from supply management, which the NDP has also always defended. Supply management and the Wheat Board provide the collective force that makes a real difference to agricultural communities. The economic benefits are not just for the farmers themselves, but for the entire community.

The supply managed sector has been a Canadian innovation. The Conservatives pay lip service to defending it, but they are ready to sell it out at a moment's notice. I know this because I have been on the trade committee for seven years, and every year since the Conservatives have been elected, bureaucrats come and talk about what portion of supply management the Conservative government would be willing to sell out. We know what the economic ramifications are for that.

It is similar to the situation with the Wheat Board. There are economic ramifications. After Australian wheat farmers did away with a similar body and privatized it, their revenues fell. Predictions were made at the time that it would particularly impact the smaller farmers, those with less clout. Those predictions, sadly, have come to pass.

In the United States, we have seen a similar situation. It has been unfortunate that there is not the same degree of collective action in the United States. They are often at the mercy of big multinational grain companies, and over the last few years farm income has fallen steadfastly and considerably in proportion to the average American household income.

In Canada, the area that has the lowest level of farm receipts is the province of Alberta. Why is it that agricultural management in Alberta has meant that farmers are poorer than anywhere else in the country?

It is a very simple question to answer. Right-wing privatization agendas, the type of mean-spirited agendas that we are now seeing from the Conservative federal government, drive down agricultural receipts and drive down income in agricultural communities. In areas where there is more collective action and where there have been strong NDP governments, agricultural receipts are higher.

This mean-spirited attempt by the Conservatives to run roughshod over western farmers, even though 62% voted in favour of maintaining the single desk, can only lead to lower incomes for most farmers.

Conservatives would say they do not care about that and that they just care about the top 10% or 1% or whoever wants to contribute to their electoral fund. The reality is that the government has to be more mature, more responsible and less ideological. The government has to look at the interests of all of the west and the interests of the agricultural communities, but the government is not doing this.

I spoke earlier about the sweater vest. We remember when the Prime Minister was going around the country in a sweater vest talking about moderation and how a Conservative government would somehow be more moderate than anyone expected it to be. That was what the Conservatives' commitment was.

• (1225)

The commitment from the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food going into the election on May 2 was to let farmers decide. That was the commitment. Those were stolen votes that Conservatives were able to obtain in those key ridings.

Mr. Speaker, you will remember, as I do, that a lot of those prairie ridings were hotly contested between Conservatives and New Democrats. The Conservatives made the commitment that farmers would be able to make the decision. We saw the results of that decision on September 12. It is important to read it into the record again: on wheat, 62% of western farmers voted in favour of retaining the single desk—62%. That is a clear victory.

The Conservatives got 38% of the vote nationally. If the government has a mandate with 38% of the vote, then what kind of mandate is 62% of the vote? That is a strong mandate to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board. Sixty-two per cent of farmers said that they want to retain it.

Time and time again, despite the worst and most underhanded tactics of the government and some of the government MPs to try to undermine the Wheat Board, the members of the board of directors who are elected and maintained are the directors who support the Wheat Board.

The government made a commitment going into the election, I suppose because it was scared of losing seats, that it would let farmers decide. Then the farmers decided, and the government said, "No, to heck with that. No, we are not going to let farmers decide on this now. No, no. We have this majority with our 38% of the vote and we are going to run roughshod over that clear majority."

It was a clear majority by anyone's standard, unless one lives in Enver Hoxha's Albania. There is no reason to question the 62% support for the Wheat Board that came out of the plebiscite, yet the government, with 38% of the vote, is saying that it is going to stamp it down. It is going to rip it apart. The government is producing Bill C-18, which in part 4 talks about the dissolution of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The government is saying it is going to destroy the collective single desk marketing that has given farmers so much power and clout and turn farmers over to the mercy of some of the world's largest grain companies. That will drive the prices down, and drive down the income and receipts in agricultural communities all across western Canada. The government is saying it is going to drive those receipts down on the Prairies from Alberta through to Manitoba.

What does that mean? It means less money in the pockets of farmers. However, it is not just that direct impact of what the government is doing that is so despicable, but the indirect impacts, which are going to be felt right across the west. It is the small mom-and-pop grocery stores in some of those smaller communities across the western provinces. Coming from British Columbia, I have driven back and forth across this country many times. It is the grocery stores, the credit unions, the auto repair shops and the farm machinery shops. All of them are going to feel the impact of this irresponsible action.

Government Orders

That is why we are voting no on Bill C-18. It runs roughshod over what farmers in western Canada have clearly expressed time and time again. It has a profound economic impact, as we have seen in other jurisdictions that have done that. The government has done no preparation and has no business plan. It cannot even tell us what the impact is going to be.

The government is doing this strictly for ideology. On this side of the House, we are standing up for western farmers. We are standing for wheat farmers. We are saying yes to the Canadian Wheat Board, and no to Bill C-18.

• (1230)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can see that the member opposite has stuck very closely to the talking points given to him by the Wheat Board. One of the strongest lobbies in Ontario, Quebec and the Maritimes is the Canadian Wheat Board. It has been using farmers' money to push its own agenda. What I mean by this is that all farmers have to sell their wheat and malt barley to the Canadian Wheat Board, and the Canadian Wheat Board uses some of that money to then wine and dine the members opposite to convince them that they have to continue to support it.

I really wonder if the member even knows that those farmers do not own their wheat. If they want to do something with their wheat, such as mill it and then sell the flour to somebody in Ontario, they cannot do it. I can give examples of farmers in my riding who had an agreement with an Ontario flour mill that the Wheat Board put a stop to.

My question is this: is it fair for farmers be forced to pay for lobbyists who present only one side of the issue to the MPs opposite?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, this despicable ideological agenda is exactly the point we have been making over the course of the few hours that the government has permitted debate. Somehow it is impossible for anybody to actually talk to a western farmer that supports the Wheat Board. The ideological mindset on the other side of the House is that somehow there has to be some kind of plot, because otherwise no one would support the Wheat Board because the Conservatives do not support it.

Sixty-two per cent of western farmers said they wanted to keep the Wheat Board. In the member's riding, 62% of the farmers, on average, support the Wheat Board. My question back to the member is this: why is he not standing up for the farmers in his riding? They support the Wheat Board. Why is he not standing up for them? Why is he not their voice in Parliament, rather than being the voice of the Prime Minister? Rather than just throwing out these prepared speaking notes from the Prime Minister's Office, why is he not speaking up for western farmers? Why is he ripping up the mandate he got?

He should be speaking up for them. He should be speaking up on the floor. He should be—

• (1235)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Questions and comments. The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my grandfather farmed his entire life until the day he died. He was a member of the UPA and as such, he was able to benefit from collective negotiation in order to get a better price for his grains.

Can my NDP colleague tell me what western Canadian farmers would lose, concretely, if the Canadian Wheat Board were dismantled?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the question from my colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord. His question is much better than the last question asked by the Conservatives, which was not very good at all, in my opinion. The hon. member for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord has made a very good showing in this Parliament and he has been here for only four months. I used to live in Chicoutimi and I recognize the quality of the remarks he makes here.

His question is very good, very simple and very clear: what will be the economic impact on western Canadian farmers, wheat farmers in particular? The Conservatives have no interest in disclosing whether they have done any studies, because they know full well that the end of the Canadian Wheat Board will lead to lower household incomes for farmers. It is not just farm families who will suffer from the economic impact, but also the entire community. The government has provided no figures.

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has mentioned a few things. He is from British Columbia, as am I.

I met with the BC Grain Producers Association, which represents British Columbia grain growers. It is absolutely in support of our position.

Is the member okay with voting against our own B.C. grain growers?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the new member to the House.

We have 62% of western farmers supporting the single desk. It is not a few lobbyists, which I know Conservatives have been meeting, who make the difference. It is what farmers want. Sixty-two per cent of western farmers have said, clearly and unambiguously, that they support the single desk market. Many of them live in ridings that the Conservatives won. Admittedly, the Conservatives said that they would let farmers decide, but now they are not.

Is the member prepared now to break ranks with his government when he knows that western farmers do not want this legislation?

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the member opposite who was just speaking that \$5.2 billion goes through the Canadian Wheat Board, that it costs \$75 million in administrative fees to run and that the rest goes back to the farmers. It has been a real success.

Government Orders

I want to thank the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster for his excellent speech. Does he believe that the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board will make families poorer and weaken farmers' bargaining power, since they will have to fend for themselves to get the best prices for their crops?

• (1240)

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, of course it will. I thank the member for her question. She makes a huge contribution to this House and I am pleased that she is here.

In Australia, the situation is quite clear, the numbers do not lie. When Australia eliminated this mechanism that protects farmers, the family income of wheat growers dropped. Wheat producers in the United States have been at a serious disadvantage because there is nothing like the Canadian Wheat Board in place there. And it is perhaps because Canadian farmers are more prosperous than U.S. farmers that the Americans have lobbied against the Canadian Wheat Board for years.

What will happen if the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled? No one knows how far family incomes and the indirect income of the entire community will fall. The Conservatives do not know. They did not commission any studies. They have no idea of the impact that this will have. However, we can predict that the impact will be very detrimental, very negative and substantial. For that reason we are fighting Bill C-18.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster just proves the fact that he is very good at misrepresenting what actually is happening in farm country.

He talks about the Australian wheat board. There was the complete demise of the Australian wheat board because of its own internal corruption and its involvement in the scandal involved around the UN oil-for-food programme. The wheat board actually took itself out of the game, and it had nothing to do with political interference, and things in Australia got better.

Let us talk about the Canadian situation. Ontario had a monopoly in the Ontario Wheat Board. That was changed and a voluntary system was put in. There is more wheat and more wheat processing happening in Ontario today than there was before we removed the monopoly.

We know that when we took oats out of the Wheat Board, wheat processing and wheat acres increased and the returns to farmers increased. Farmers now want to grow oats again.

What is happening in wheat? Wheat acres are dropping. Wheat returns to farmers are reduced. Farmers want the ability to go and market their own grain, create value-added opportunities, create jobs and opportunities in western Canada just like everybody else in the rest of Canada.

Mr. Peter Julian: There was not a question in that, Mr. Speaker, but I would like to ask a question back to the hon. member.

What does he not understand about 62%? We hear Conservatives saying that they know this farmer or that farmer who is opposed to the Wheat Board and they are basing their entire strategy of gutting

the Wheat Board on a few friends who do not like it. Sixty-two percent, and that includes farmers in his riding as well, of farmers said that they wanted to keep the Wheat board. It is a simple message. It is something that any Conservative MP should understand. Sixty-two percent of western farmers want to keep single desk marketing.

Why will those members not listen to the needs and desires of western Canadian farmers?

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join my colleagues in support of marketing choice for western Canadian grain farmers. The move to marketing freedom is exciting for all Saskatchewan farmers, especially Saskatchewan durum growers, who produce close to 80% of Canada's durum. This will mean greater price transparency for farmers before spring seeding so they can make more informed decisions about spring planting. This will give farmers the flexibility to react quickly to market signals and take advantage of market pricing opportunities.

The days of durum growers being forced to store their crop for one to three or more years are over. The days when durum growers had high quality durum and they were forced to liquidate it on the feed market in order to make cash because the board would not sell that durum are over. That nightmare will be a thing of the past.

There is no doubt this is all very good news for Saskatchewan producers. The wheat and barley business in Saskatchewan is a major driver of our economy, bringing almost \$2 billion to the farm gate. The sky is the limit, like the minister said, on what the potential can be once this legislation is through: \$2 billion dollars is a small number, \$2 billion could be \$4 billion, or \$6 billion or \$8 billion.

When we look at where wheat was in the thirties and the forties and then we look at what happened when we brought in the single desk and how the processing system moved, how it all went somewhere else, just think what could happen when that could now move back onto the Prairies. Think of how farmers can participate and partner and form their own co-operatives to mill their own durum, wheat and barley. I am confident a business can grow even more under marketing choice.

I must commend our Prime Minister, the Minister of Agriculture, the parliamentary secretary and all my colleagues for all the hard work they have done on this file. Conservative members have been out in their ridings talking to farmers. We do that on a weekly basis when we go back home on weekends. Our farmers have been very blunt. They have asked us to move fast and make this happen because they need the freedom and they need it now. That is what is happening here today, and I commend the minister and the Prime Minister for seeing this through and allowing farmers to finally have the freedom to market their own grain.

Government Orders

One thing about marketing freedom that will be of benefit is the innovation that will come from it. I worked in the agriculture sector before I was involved with farming and my career in Ottawa. I can remember the days of summer fold. Farmers used to summer fold half and half. Suddenly farmers started asking why they needed to summer fold. Why not just seed into the stubble? All of a sudden direct seeding happened. A few manufacturers, Bourgault, Flexi-Coil, Morris, which are farmer-owned businesses, looked at that and thought this was great. Why would they even need to work it at all?

If we look at the results of that innovation, we will find that costs for farmers have been reduced substantially, such as the cost of fuel. In fact, tractor manufacturers were concerned because the hours they were putting on their tractors, flipping tractors every two to three years. Now it is every five to seven years. That is the type of innovation that could happen on the Prairies and that is the type of innovation farmers would have to put in to wheat and barley.

Let us also talk about the innovation that we have seen in non-burnt crops. Let us look at value-added processing.

One crop that my colleague from Manitoba talked about was oats. This crop was under the single desk. Under that system, farmers would not grow that crop because they could not get more than 80¢ a bushel. The board released oats out of the single desk and a year later the price per bushel went up. A year later I saw farmers growing oats. I talked to my neighbour and asked him why he was growing oats and he told me that it was paying aid the bills. He actually substituted oats for wheat. If we asked farmers what paid the bills over the last 10 or 15 years, they would say canola, pulses and oats, not wheat or barley.

We hear this argument about grains not being able to be processed on the Prairies because it is too far for market. Let us look at the canola sector. Let us look at Yorkton, which has two processing plants. Let us look at Lloydminster, which has another canola plant. Let us look at Clavet, Saskatchewan, a small town outside of Saskatoon, which has another canola processing plant.

Canola contributes almost \$6 billion to the Canadian economy. Canola was not a big crop in the seventies. This all happened in the last 30 years. Why did wheat not grow at that same level? Why did wheat innovation not happen? We have to ask these questions. We cannot put our heads in the sand.

• (1245)

One of the answers to those questions is the CWB and its process in not making changes, in not exploring new opportunities, unwilling to allow value-added to happen in the prairies.

I think back to the days of the Weyburn Inland Terminal, which was a very progressive group of farmers. It built the first terminal on the prairies. It introduced the concept of direct hit trains to the west coast. It introduced the concept of cleaning the grain on the prairies so the dockage could be fed to cows and the clean grain would go to the west coast without having to take the cleaning charges out.

These farmers figured that there was a durum plant across the line in North Dakota and they could do that in Weyburn. They raised the money, they had a business plan, they had the market and they had it all developed. Then the CWB said, absolutely not, that this was not allowed, that it was not under the act.

The minister from Wascana, instead of backing farmers, what did he do? He backed the board. The farmers were irate. When farmers were told they could not value-add and process their own products that might have been the straw that broke the camel's back.

When I used travel with Flexi-Coil, I had a dealer down at Milk River. Milk River is right on the Montana line. Every once in a while we would sneak across the line and talk to some farmers with a salesman I knew down there. One farmer grew a lot of barley, and I asked him why he grew so much barley because there was no money in barley in Canada. He told me that the guys from Coors went to his farm and told him if I grew this type of barley, they would supply the seed. They said that if he worked with them and their agronomist to ensure they would get the proper quality, they would give him a price that he could not say no to, and they did that.

All of a sudden the farmers around Milk River on the American side were growing a pile of barley. They were selling it to Coors, making a premium, making a good profit. The company was happy and the farmers were happy. That is an example of partnerships that work.

Coors tried to do this on the Canadian side because Canadian farmers thought it was a good deal. Who said no? The Canadian Wheat Board. It was unable or unwilling to accommodate Coors. The location of malt plants that have been built over the last few years are not in Canada. They are in Montana. What about the location of durum plants up till now? The biggest durum plant was in downtown Winnipeg at CIGI. Does that make sense? We ship Canadian durum all over the world and the only processing plant in the west is in downtown Winnipeg.

Why? There has to be a reason why that value-added and that processing is not happening on the prairies. When we do a process of elimination, we can see why that is. It was because the board, at that point in time, wanted to export grain. It did not want to see processed grain. That is what its mandate was and that is what it would do. If that meant farmers could not participate in the value-added chain, so be it.

Finally the board would tell farmers that if they wanted to export their grain, the Board could do that. It could give them a buyback. The farmers could sell their grain to the board and the board would charge them a premium to buy it back. Then they could do what they wanted with it. That sounded really good. If farmers could buy it back, they could look at the U.S. market or if they wanted to ship some barley to Hong Kong or China, they could do that. However, when the farmers realized what the board charged them on the buyback, it was next to impossible for them to make any money. Yet when farmers got their final payment from the Canadian Wheat Board, it was never close to the buyback. Where did that money go?

Farmers would shake their heads because the board said that they had opportunity under this system to do that, but really they did not. Instead of telling the farmers yes, instead of working with farmers to help them develop these niche market, the board's answer was no, absolutely not.

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In the late nineties a farmer talked to a Wheat Board representative. He was giving the representative a hard time about the Coors barley. The representative proceeded to tell him that the wheat and barley did not belong to him once he harvested it.

Let us think about this, just go through the process again. In the spring the farmer will plant as many Canola acres as he can or as many pulse and peas acres as he can because that is his cash crop, but he has to do a rotational crop.

• (1250)

For members who do not farm, a rotational crop is a filler crop so the type of chemical that is used can be changed so that weed tolerance does not build up and it reduces the weeds in the fields. It is not something they want to do. It is something that they have to do as they farm.

Then they bring in wheat and in another case barley. They do that as their rotational crop. Fall comes and they are harvesting the wheat, a beautiful crop of durum, nice crop of canola and pulses. They have to pay some bills because farmers take out cash advances so they have to haul some grain off that combine to pay those bills.

Wait a minute, I want to haul my wheat. I am told no, no contract so I cannot haul wheat right now. How do I get cashflow? I would have to maximize my cash advance if I need cashflow. If I do not want to do that, authorities do not care it is not their problem. I cannot haul that wheat or barley.

What do farmers do? They have to sell their pulses and they sell their canola. What does the trade do? They cannot take all that grain at the same time, so the basis goes up. The actual price the farmers get off the combine gets reduced because the board is unwilling to move the grain at that point in time.

Does this have the best interests of farmers at heart? It does not. It never has. It was a system made for the 1940s and 1950s. Like my colleague said, this system did not come into play because farmers wanted it. It came into play because farmers participated in helping the war effort. Then it was forced upon them. When farmers wanted out of it, they were not able to get out of it.

Liberal governments realized this was a nice cashflow for them and for their buddies. Let us look at the Liberal ties into the Canadian Wheat Board, at the people who are working there and at who is doing the survey or voter identification because that is very important when we talk about plebiscites. David Herle was sitting there doing surveys every year identifying which farmers support the single desk and which ones do not. Where did that information go? I know farmers never got to see it. Farmers did not see their file. The plebiscite claims to be so accurate and so honest. There were 51,000 permit book holders, yet there were 61,000 ballots sent out. Who received the extra 10,000 ballots? Mr. Oberg, where did they go?

A friend of mine, who is a big farmer and a fairly notable person, said a lady approached him that he did not know and told him she wanted to talk about the plebiscite. He said he became defensive, but she said her brother and sister both had votes, but they are both dead. How accurate was the plebiscite if dead people were voting in it?

More frustrating, progressive farmers who have been growing wheat for 20 years phoned me and ask where their ballots was?

These are the same people during the Wheat Board directors election saying the same thing. Why did they not get a ballot?

When they look at this sham and how the Wheat Board treats them, would they ever trust the results of a Wheat Board plebiscite? When we look at the plebiscite there is one question which was not asked which is did they want choice and the ability to use the board or the ability to sell outside the board? That was never in the question. It was either single desk or nothing.

The board of directors are like *Thelma & Louise*. They want to drive this thing off the cliff. If they cannot get their way, they will just drive the car off the cliff, come hell or high water. This is what is frustrating a lot of farmers on the Prairies these days. There are many legitimate farmers who looked at it and wanted to sell grain to the board because they liked the idea of pooling because it spread the risk. That option is going to be there. That is why it is so confusing to listen to opposition members when they are handing out teddy bears and telling us this is horrible for western Canada because they are actually talking about themselves. They are not talking about farmers.

The reality is this organization has lost touch with farmers. It has lost touch with the producers that actually wanted to use it. This organization in the last four months, instead of holding plebiscites, could have aggressively been out securing acreages. It claims it has 22,000 supporters through this so-called plebiscite. If that is the case why does it not have 22,000 producers signing up acres today and tomorrow? It would know then how many tonnes of wheat, durum and barley it would have.

• (1255)

I have had some accredited exporters who represent the board in Africa and around the world because we always talk about the board selling all this grain. The reality is it does not sell it. Accredited exporters take on that role and sell it in these countries. I find it really interesting when they come to me in Ottawa and say they cannot source wheat after March. The board tells us we cannot have it, that it will not give it to us.

Again, we have 22,000 farmers over here, an accredited exporter over here, and a CWB volunteer in the middle. The CWB has a role to play to bring them together. Do members think it will do that? No. Why? Philosophy. Again, it comes back to my *Thelma and Louise* analogy. It would rather prove us wrong and destroy the entity than actually try to make it work and that is really disappointing. It is really frustrating for me as an MP and as a farmer. It has taken that tool that was in my toolbox and instead of giving me a new tool that I can use, it has basically taken that tool and thrown it away.

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So our government did what we had to do to represent all farmers. We are not destroying the CWB. We are basically just taking away the single desk but there will be a CWB. If farmers choose to use it, they would be able to use it. If farmers choose to ship their grain through Churchill, they could do so. We would ensure that the assets, the rails and the ports, would be there for farmers to use. When it comes to producer cars, that is embedded in the Canada Grain Act, not the Canadian Wheat Board Act. That would not change. If they want to use a producer car, they can phone up the CGC and they get a producer car. Farmers who want to load their own rail car can do that.

Again, those choices are not changing. However, let us listen to what the CWB is saying, again spreading fear and mistruths or half truths. It is talking about all of them losing producer cars. That is not happening. Read the legislation. It is not there. Read the Canada Grain Act where it can be seen that it is not changing. Producer cars will be there.

We talk about Thunder Bay or Churchill. My area wants to use Churchill. We are pretty excited because there is a rail line that CN has owned for quite awhile and they have not allowed anybody to go down it and it is coming up for abandonment. Local producers are talking about getting together and buying that line, so it would actually go from Tisdale to Hudson Bay and then up to Churchill. They are excited about that. That would pull about \$15 a tonne off their freight. That \$15 a tonne is roughly \$15 an acre for an average farmer who does maybe 1,000 acres a week and that is \$15,000, hard cash, in his or her pocket. If it makes economic sense to use Churchill, farmers would use Churchill. We would ensure they have that option. We would ensure that Churchill is viable so that as the transition goes on it would not get left out.

As we see the rail improve and we see some of these farmer-owned rail lines moving grain to Churchill, it actually would get busier. Is this bad for Churchill? There is lots of potential for Churchill.

I come back to the canola sector and look at what we have seen happen there and I touched on the just under \$6 billion it brings in. I look at the old sector and 15 years ago the University of Saskatchewan in Saskatoon had a department of agriculture but that was about it. Going there now, first in Martinsville, there is an oat processing plant. That did not come into play until the single desk for oats was gone. At the University of Saskatchewan, we need to go outside to see the research people. We see all these field-size research farms. Companies have located in Saskatoon and do all this research work on canola.

I have a good friend, Dr. Fowler, who is a very well-established renowned plant breeder. He has been in front of the agriculture committee numerous times. He expressed his frustrations in being a plant breeder when he developed new varieties of winter wheat for Canadian farmers and then was told by the CWB "no". However, he then used that variety in North Dakota and Montana and it would be the number one variety in the United States and our farmers would not have access to it. Yet, we paid for that research.

In closing, there are some other people we need to honour. The late Art Walde was a farmer who just wanted choice and freedom. It is too bad he is not here because today he would be celebrating that

freedom of choice. I think of the 12 farmers who were handcuffed and went to jail. They are celebrating today. I think of Jim Chatenay who used to get kicked out of board meetings because he just wanted to present other options to the board. He is celebrating. I think about how they threatened his family and threatened to take away his farm because he offered them an option of something different or that he opposed the way they handled things with farmers. I think that part of this is for Jim.

• (1300)

Finally, this is great legislation. I encourage the opposition members to actually understand what is going on here. If they understood, they would not be opposing this legislation. In fact, they would get behind it and they would realize just how great this will be for Canadian farmers and western Canadian farmers.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the member for Calgary Centre said that he does not trust the Wheat Board plebiscite. His arguments are based on some testimonies, his personal experience as a farmer, and a great deal of speculation about the future of farmers.

My question is very simple: is my colleague prepared to support a valid and neutral consultation? Would he be open to an objective study of the situation and the consequences of dismantling the board? If not, why not?

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the question and I will be sincere in my answer. I will try not to politicize it.

There was a consultation; it is called a general election. In my riding, 70% of the farmers, outside the city, voted for me. This is one of the things that they wanted to see done. In fact, last week, I was back in my riding, I did some passport clinics. I had maybe one out of 500 farmers who came up to me and said he did not necessarily like the changes. That is only one out of 500.

When we start talking about the second part, it is always an issue when looking at moving forward. Our farmers are telling us we need to move forward quickly. They cannot afford the single desk much longer. That is why they are insisting we move forward as quickly as we can.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Saskatchewan for his remarks, for the incredible knowledge that he brings as a farmer from Saskatchewan to this file, and for the excellent work that he has done on the agriculture committee.

When the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board came to Ottawa and bought the NDP caucus breakfast, it was reported that he requested that it delay the passage of the bill so that it would have a negative impact on the markets. Would the member be willing to share his thoughts on this?

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Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar has been a great member. She was elected at the same time as I was, and her knowledge on agriculture issues is greatly improving. I know she does a great job representing her farmers.

I always get a little concerned when I see CWB directors spending more time in Ottawa than they do out selling our grain. They have another year to fulfill their contracts. They have until 2012 to actually finish selling this year's crop. I am concerned that they are spending all that time trying to disrupt the marketplace instead of making the transition so that farmers will reach the benefit of the grains that are grown.

As far as the existing board of directors, and Mr. Oberg himself, they are going to do what they are going to do, I guess, but the reality is they have quit working for farmers and are more concerned with keeping their own jobs. That is what is going on.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member for Prince Albert, who expressed his opinion very clearly, with a lot of confidence and what appears to be a lot of certainty, why the government did not hold the plebiscite?

The plebiscite is in the legislation that created the Canadian Wheat Board. What prevented the government from holding the plebiscite that should have been held under the existing legislation? Was it fear of losing the plebiscite or was it that, from the outset, the government did not want to take the results into account? Action cannot be taken on such an important matter based on feelings and people's comments. If the government is questioning the quality of the consultation, it should organize a consultation that it deems to be valid and then it will get its answer.

[*English*]

Mr. Randy Hoback: First, Mr. Speaker, I am representing the farmers' point of view, not my point of view. I am confident in what I say because the farmers have been fairly clear on what they want to see happen here in Ottawa.

The other thing I would point out is that our farmers are not waiting for the opposition to get educated on this file. They want us to move forward. They do not feel that they should have to wait for opposition members who do not represent them in that area to get up to speed, nor should they have to pay for them to get up to speed. If opposition members were to take some advice outside the Canadian Wheat Board, I do not think they would be taking the position they are taking. Every time they defend the CWB, my numbers go up another 2% in my riding.

There are two plebiscites. There was a plebiscite on May 2 that elected a Conservative majority and which actually put Conservative members in all of that area. There will be another plebiscite four years from now when farmers will be able to review the job we have done.

• (1310)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague gave an excellent speech. He talked about freedom and how it came about that farmers were

forced into collectivism and a government monopoly. They were forced to do something and many of them had no choice.

We are talking about freedom. I have heard about the fearmongering and misrepresentation. He mentioned that many farmers in his riding actually support a strong voluntary wheat board. What does he think it is in the ideology of the Liberal Party and its comrades in the NDP that they will not support freedom of choice and a strong voluntary wheat board? What does he think it is in their ideology that would stop them from supporting choice?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, that is a good question. I am not sure if it is ideology or just lack of knowledge on the issue. It could be one or the other.

I also want to point out that under the Liberal government the Canadian Wheat Board was put in place and a lot of participants in the backrooms of the Liberal Party have benefited from the Canadian Wheat Board being in place. Maybe that is the reason behind it. We can look at David Herle. It seems that as grain was shipped to the east coast, there was somebody tied to the Liberal Party with his or her hand out, whether it was Canada Steamship Lines or someone else. That might explain why the Liberals are really concerned about this file, because they actually have no representation in the Prairies.

As far as the New Democrats are concerned, it is strictly ideology. They really cannot understand that in a free market the economy grows and people move back to the provinces. I come from Saskatchewan. Four years ago there was a Saskatchewan Party government and the province's towns were worried about how to pay for infrastructure because everybody was leaving. Now they are worried about paying for infrastructure because everybody is coming back. They need more commercial lots and more residences. That is the difference between socialism and letting the market do what it should do.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the hon. member is confident or arrogant but a person has to be careful when he is busy looking up instead of watching where he is going that he does not trip and fall. I find it rather odd and do not understand why Canada Steamship Lines is being brought into this. As a member from Quebec and a native of Joliette, I am able to speak on behalf of all Canadians as well. The hon. member should not say that we are unable to understand the issues and the situation elsewhere, regardless of where we come from. It is not a monopoly. If he is in favour of choice, we can talk about it. Given his arrogance and manner of speaking, I am concerned that he is trying to move to the next step, which is supply management. Here, I am thinking of the dairy farmers in my riding. Is the hon. member trying to tell me that he is against supply management?

[*English*]

He is against supply management. Is that what he is saying?

Mr. Randy Hoback: Mr. Speaker, we are back to the fear and smear campaign of the Liberal Party. They are trying to concern their farmers who are not going to be affected by this legislation. There is nothing in this legislation that talks about supply management. There is nothing that talks about dairy, eggs or poultry, absolutely nothing. We have spoken with representatives of those industries and they understand what is going on. Representatives of those industries are talking to farmers and they understand why farmers want choice. We do not see them jumping up and down on this file.

When we talk about arrogance, arrogance is when a minister puts farmers in jail and looks the other way. Arrogance is telling a farmer that he cannot own the crop he grows. Arrogance is telling a farmer who looks across the border to Montana and sees all of his buddies prospering that he cannot have that same prosperity just because the Liberal government said so. That is the arrogance of the Liberal government of the past. That is the arrogance of the CWB, and it is why it has to change.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to be in this full House once again speaking on this topic. I wish to say that it gives me pleasure, but it does not give me pleasure.

It is tragic to see that it has come to this. Ever since my election in 2006, I have witnessed a systematic smear campaign by the Conservative government to discredit the Canadian Wheat Board. It is a campaign based on ideology and not market sense or democratic principles.

We have seen gag orders put in place prohibiting the CWB from outlining its position, the firing of the former CEO for speaking out in support of the CWB single desk, and most recently, a flagrant violation of democracy by not respecting the recent plebiscite where farmers voted to keep the CWB as it is.

In Minnedosa, Manitoba, during the last election campaign, the minister was quoted as saying that his party respects the vote of farmers who support the single desk. He suggested there would not be any attempt to dismantle CWB unless a majority of producers voted for it. I quote:

Until farmers make this change, I am not prepared to work arbitrarily. They are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too.

Two days ago a number of us stood in this House to denounce the flagrant violation of democratic principles by the President of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovych. It is tragic and somehow ironic that these same Conservative MPs who spoke out for democratic rights in Ukraine are now ignoring their own minister's comments made in Minnedosa.

We have heard in the House almost daily how the last election was somehow a mandate to do away with the Canadian Wheat Board. Let us not forget there are many issues that people look at prior to casting their ballot. We know, for example, although I do not agree with it, that the gun registry was decisive in swinging votes in western Canada. It is important to remember, however, that farmers only represent 2% of the population spread over 57 western ridings.

If a federal election were called today with the only issue being the dismantling of the Wheat Board, Canadians, including the farming community, would ensure that this so-called mandate would

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not win. It is because the Conservatives have won a majority in this House they are moving forward with their ill-guided plan to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

As stated by Bill Gehl of the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance:

...claiming the Conservative Party has a mandate from farmers to change the Canadian Wheat Board is ridiculous and I think most urban voters agree that farmers should decide this issue, not Ottawa.

We often hear the government draw a parallel between Ontario farmers and western Canadian grain producers. The two situations are completely different. Anyone who attempts to say they are the same is simply ignoring the facts.

Ontario farmers decided for themselves on changes to their marketing system and not the federal government which made the decision. They chose the open market. Quebec farmers, on the other hand, have chosen to market their wheat collectively.

The other point is the impact on Canada and on prairie farmers from changes to the CWB is much greater than the impact of changes to the Ontario system. Most of Ontario's wheat, about 90%, is sold within Canada or in the northern U.S.A. Most of the prairie wheat, roughly 68%, is exported.

A number of western farmers believe that more U.S. markets would somehow magically open up to them as a result of the loss of the single desk. However, they forget that the U.S. agriculture industry is extremely protectionist. We have seen that in the past. This is especially true now under their buy American philosophy. It is therefore very unlikely that the U.S. would take additional Canadian wheat unless the price of the wheat was reduced to the point that it could replace their domestically grown wheat, allowing the U.S.A. to export even more.

The fact is the Canadian Wheat Board currently seeks high-end markets for high-quality milling wheat and durum in over 70 countries, and does not have to pursue markets by reducing its prices. I might add that this obviously gives a premium to Canadian farmers.

•(1315)

The other important point to mention when comparing Ontario and western Canada is the fact that transportation is a less important factor in Ontario. Most Ontario farmers can get their crop to market for \$15 a tonne in freight costs due to the close proximity of flour mills and Great Lakes terminals. On the Prairies, the volume produced along with the distance between farms, country elevators, inland terminals, domestic markets and ports make transportation costs significant.

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The Canadian Wheat Board is a strong advocate for fair transportation rates and provides a countervailing force to the railway's power. It is very probable that railway costs will increase for farmers once the CWB is gone.

Let us not make the mistake of deluding ourselves that the Wheat Board will survive in a dual market system. Currently it provides stability and certainty for farmers in what I would say are volatile world markets. Once it no longer has a mandate, farmers will be free to choose when and if they wish to deal through the Wheat Board. This will tend to bring prices down because the Wheat Board will have lost its authority among its trading partners. Let us not forget that a powerful organization with a monopoly can dictate prices in the world and obtain the highest premium for our farmers. Farmers will eventually end up on the losing end.

In regard to the movement of grain in western Canada, without the Wheat Board's ability to organize deliveries, it is likely that farmers close to inland terminals and those with large trucking capacity will plug the system at harvest time. The strongest will survive while others will be left behind. In other words, it will be the survival of the fittest.

• (1320)

[*Translation*]

What will be the consequences of eliminating the single-desk system? First, we will see decreased revenues for farmers. Now, the Canadian Wheat Board obtains lucrative premiums for farmers in the Prairies, which means that the Canadian Wheat Board takes a highly strategic approach to where and when it sells during the year. The result is that, every year, the board enables farmers to earn several million dollars more than they would in a free market. But we are headed towards the free market now.

The Canadian Wheat Board does not have any capital assets. Once it is dismantled, it will need to acquire a considerable amount of capital assets if it wants even the slightest chance of surviving in a free market. Who will pay for that? Plus, there will be very high costs associated with dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board.

Current activities will have to cease. All of the related costs will have to be paid so that no potential new entity ends up with that burden. Since the government is the one that chose to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board and not the farmers, the farmers should not end up on the hook for these expenses.

And then there is the city of Winnipeg. The Canadian Wheat Board employs over 400 people at its headquarters and helps maintain over 2,000 jobs, for a total of over \$66 million in labour income in Winnipeg. At the provincial level, the Canadian Wheat Board's contribution to gross production is estimated at \$320 million, which represents over 3,000 jobs and labour income of over \$140 million. What will happen to the city of Winnipeg and the province of Manitoba, to the people who are working now and are part of this system? Will they lose their jobs? Will they be able to find another job somewhere else? What we see here is uncertainty.

[*English*]

What we are seeing here is what I would call "economic madness". A successful organization or a farmer-run corporation that puts money into the pockets of farmers and contributes millions of

dollars to the economy of our nation is being dismantled to satisfy the demand of a small number of farmers who think they will be able to survive in a ruthless world market.

In all probability some will survive, but what about the rest? What will happen to the majority who have relied on the stability and protection of the Wheat Board in difficult economic times?

The debate is ongoing and history will be the judge.

I have before me a letter written to the Prime Minister, dated May 6, shortly after the election, by Mr. John Manley, CEO of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, which is an extremely powerful business lobby group representing 150 of the most powerful corporations in our country.

I will quote from page 3 of the letter, which states:

As a demonstration of Canada's strong commitment to trade liberalization, we endorse your plan to reform the marketing practices of the Canadian Wheat Board.

[...]

Consistent with that, we believe the time is right to phase out the national supply management systems for eggs, dairy products and poultry, which penalize consumers and have seriously damaged our country's reputation as a champion of open markets—

The Canadian Council of Chief Executives is directing our Prime Minister to get rid of the Wheat Board and supply management.

People laugh at this and say that there is no way that could be happening because they are supporting supply management. The question we must ask ourselves is not if but when will the Conservatives be phasing out supply management now that they have successfully destroyed the Canadian Wheat Board.

I ask my colleagues on the other side to answer that question. I submit it will be in the not too distant future. There is tremendous pressure from the WTO, our trading partners and the European Union for Canada to decrease or eliminate its tariffs on supply management commodities.

Our country is currently negotiating, although in secret, a free trade agreement with the European Union, the CETA. Last night, at a presentation hosted by the Council of Canadians and CUPE, we were told in no uncertain terms by an expert from France who has been studying the situation in Europe that in addition to pushing for unlimited access to service contracts at the provincial and municipal levels, and I am sure that includes Prince Albert and the surrounding communities, Europe is demanding access to our natural resources. Obviously agriculture is on the table.

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What would stop our negotiators from increasing the tariff-free quota from the current 7.5% to 10% and decreasing the over-quota tariffs to satisfy European demands?

Technically, we would still have supply management. However, we have been told by the dairy producers that should that happen each Canadian dairy farmer stands to lose approximately \$70,000.

This is a scary situation given the fact that the government's mantra has been and continues to be to open up as many markets as possible without evaluating the potential negative effect on our own producers. It would dismantle and do away with the single desk of the Wheat Board without evaluating potential economic consequences. It would sign an agreement with Europe without evaluating the impact that would have on our municipalities, on obtaining pharmaceuticals, on our water rights and on our agricultural producers.

Today we have witnessed a move by the Conservatives to limit debate on this very important issue.

In today's press release, the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance states:

Even more ominous are rumours the Harper administration intends to avoid Agriculture Committee hearings and fast track this bill through the unusual use of a Legislative Committee hearing process.

• (1325)

It goes on to state:

This is inappropriate because it will restrict Parliament's right to examine this Legislation and to hear from those most affected: the farmers of western Canada....

People around the world know it is simply wrong for a government to remove hard-won democratic rights from its citizens. Cancelling democracy for western Canadian farmers to end our Wheat Board is a bullying tactic of the worst sort. We are asking for the help of all Canadians to oppose this attack on farmers and the democratic process—

In a letter to the minister, the chair of the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board communicated that the Wheat Board had put considerable effort into analyzing what a redefined Canadian Wheat Board would require for any prospect of success. The conclusion it reached was that no alternative could be identified that comes anywhere close to offering farmers the benefits provided by the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk system.

Therefore, if there is no analysis and we are unsure of what the future holds, it begs the question as to why this is happening and why it has not been put to a democratic vote.

There we have it. The government has not performed an economic analysis. It has shown a flagrant disregard for democracy. As well, it is dictating its ideological agenda after having received only 40% of the vote in the last election.

Mention has been made that members on this side of the House are basing their arguments on ideology. Our arguments are based on practical considerations, such as potential economic impacts, impacts to the communities and the City of Winnipeg, impacts on the short line railway systems, and impacts on the port of Churchill. None of these has been identified in any economic analysis that I have seen unless they are hidden in an office somewhere.

This is a sad state for democracy. What is happening here makes absolutely no sense. Surely the minister could get together with the

members of the board of directors of the Wheat Board, most of whom are elected and most of whom support the status quo, to attempt to work out some kind of system that is not based on ideology.

• (1330)

[*Translation*]

The Canadian Wheat Board serves farmers in western Canada to market their wheat, durum and barley. Under the Canadian Wheat Board Act, the organization has an official mandate to bring in the highest possible receipts for farmers from the sale of grain, by effectively profiting from being a single-desk seller.

The Canadian Wheat Board sells farmers' grain in 70 countries. It hands over all of the profits from the sale to farmers, between \$4 billion and \$7 billion a year.

[*English*]

If we look at the proposed scenario, there are tremendous costs involved in this process of dismantling, changing and modifying the Wheat Board. Who will pay the hundreds of millions of dollars required to transform the organization presently in place? The Wheat Board was financed by farmers and has given profits back to farmers. Will the taxpayer pay for its transformation? Will farmers see increased costs? Will donations be forthcoming from some benevolent society to ensure that no money is lost? These are questions we must ask ourselves.

As I said earlier, history will be the judge of this very sad day in Parliament.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I enjoy working with the member on the agriculture committee. Even though we have differing ideologies, I know he has a passion in his heart for agriculture and wears his ideology on his sleeve. Unfortunately, that ideology will cost farmers a lot of money.

For example, the price for milling durum wheat today in Fortuna, North Dakota, which is roughly 20 miles from the Canadian border, is \$12.47. Today the Canadian Wheat Board's fixed price is \$7.53 and the pool outlook is \$9.47. The Wheat Board is asking \$16.23 for that farmer to buy back that durum wheat and ship it across to the U.S.

There is a huge difference between the pool outlook and the buyback. Where does that money go?

• (1335)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, we have heard the arguments that the price is different across the board than it is for farmers. However, that is in the current market. Will the market remain static? What would happen if we tried to sell our wheat across the border when the market was saturated? If we consider the buy America policy of the U.S., it would be ludicrous to think that our farmers could tap into that market on a volume basis.

Any money made by the Wheat Board goes back to farmers. It does not make economic sense to do what the Conservatives are attempting to do.

Government Orders

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Edmonton—St. Albert questioned the ideology of the member speaking. It is better that the member speaking wear that ideology on his sleeve than have it spread all across Bill C-18 the way it is now by the government.

The Alliance Grain Traders announced last week that it will invest \$50 million to build a pasta plant in Saskatchewan. Could the member speculate as to why it would do that? Could he comment as to whether the AGT expects the price of grain to go up, go down or stay the same?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his tireless efforts on behalf of farmers in this country. It has been a pleasure to work with him over the last few years on the agriculture committee. I look forward to a continuing collaboration with him and others in his party on these important issues.

It is an interesting coincidence that announcement was made now that this legislation is coming in. There have been more value-added benefits taking place in western Canada than south of the border. There is more milling taking place in western Canada than south of border. The value-added chain is being supported.

Obviously the Alliance Grain Traders would invest money there because it intends on making money. It begs the question though why it would do that during an economic downturn and not two years ago when the economic situation was better. The fact of the matter is it was unaware that the Wheat Board would be dismantled.

By dismantling the Wheat Board, the price of wheat would go down and companies would build milling plants because they would not have to pay premium prices. One does not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member from British Columbia Southern Interior because I know how passionate he is about agriculture and farmers. I would like to ask him what effect this bill would have on Canada's food and economic sovereignty and all of the related possibilities.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question and her participation in the debate. Our food and economic sovereignty is being threatened now more than ever before. By whom? By huge transnational, multinational corporations. Obviously, dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board would be a good thing for them. It is to their advantage to not have such strong competition from the Canadian Wheat Board, which represents Canadian wheat growers and exporters.

I think it is clear that we will see more transnational corporations coming to this country and more blackmail. Or they will simply say: this is the price, you can agree to it or go elsewhere. All of these so-called free trade agreements—really just pressure from multinationals—threaten our sovereignty, particularly our food sovereignty. The policy here is to open more markets to free trade. That adds nothing to our ability to grow and produce food for ourselves. Yes, I believe it threatens our sovereignty.

• (1340)

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I are both on the agriculture committee. I will use Chicken Little as an agriculture metaphor.

We see other crops like canola, pulses, et cetera, on the open competitive market in the world. Why has the sky not fallen for them?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting comparison. The fact is that prior to the markets opening up for other crops, there has not been a single desk entity negotiating good prices for, in this case, wheat farmers.

The market is already established. I hear the same argument on GMOs, which is that if a canola GMO is successful, why would we not introduce any more GMOs?

Those producers have done it. They have carved out their market. However, when they did that, the situation was different. It is a tougher time now. It is going to be a tougher time for wheat growers to carve out that market and to have the representation to get those markets on the international level.

It is now 2011. It is throwing people open to a ruthless market and to competitors who heavily subsidize their agriculture, such as the European Union, the United States and others. It is going to take a long time to stabilize that. In the meantime, wheat farmers are going to take a hit. It is as simple as that.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NPD): Mr. Speaker, I would like to correct the record. A while ago I mentioned Bill Gehl was the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board, but in my haste I had forgotten to indicate "Alliance" at the end. I am very well aware that Allen Oberg is the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board. Again, I want to mention that Mr. Gehl had indicated that the Port of Churchill is going to be toast, in contrast to what the minister explained a while ago.

The Conservatives have been arguing that the Ontario experience with removing the single desk can be applied to western farmers. Maybe my colleague could explain why we cannot compare apples to oranges when it comes to the Canadian Wheat Board and the Ontario experience.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, there are a number of points.

First, Ontario farmers decided on the marketing system themselves. They decided that experience. Western wheat production is 10 times that of eastern Canada. It has a different transportation system. It only costs \$15 a tonne in Ontario to move wheat to the Great Lakes or just across the border, but there is a tremendous cost in western Canada.

The Ontario wheat business is completely different from what it is in western Canada. Ontario produces soft wheat used for pastry, cookies, doughnuts, et cetera. Most of Ontario's wheat is sold within Canada. U.S.-Canada trade in wheat is relatively low. Transportation, as I said, is a less important factor in Ontario.

Government Orders

Ontario farmers actually pay more handling fees now than they did under the single desk, which is quite interesting. If we transport this to the argument we have now, with transportation fees already high for western Canadian farmers, what are they going to pay when they lose the single desk?

As well, wheat is cleared from the Ontario system quickly, whereas it often takes a long time to store and move grain in western Canada.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to let you know I will be sharing my time with the member for Red Deer.

Our government has introduced legislation that aims to give western Canadian grain growers the freedom to choose to market their wheat, durum and barley independently or by voluntary pool.

I am proud to stand in support of our government's intention to bring marketing freedom to western Canadian grain farmers. With marketing freedom, farmers in British Columbia and across the Prairies will be able to make marketing decisions that are best for their own businesses. They will have the opportunity to take advantage of special markets.

As Virginia Labbie from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business said, "The message from farmers is that the CWB is not currently meeting producers'...needs. It is evident growers need more consistent, timely, accessible and transparent marketing signals in order to make the best possible marketing decisions for their farm".

When western Canadian farmers have the freedom of an open market, they will not have to wait for an outside agency to tell them, up to a year and a half after the sale of their grain, the final price of the sale. Western Canadian grain farmers want the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world.

The creation and additional use of futures contracts will allow producers to manage their own individual risk. British Columbia ports are the main end of the pipeline for our grains prior to export. B.C. processors could see the opportunity to have direct, regular access prior to leaving our shores to pick and choose from the very best of the produce for the creation of high-end, high-value special products.

We know that an open market will attract investment, create jobs and help build a stronger economy for Canada and Canadians. We know farmers want to make their marketing decisions based on what is best for their own businesses. That is why we have brought this legislation to remove the single desk monopoly, and not the Wheat Board, as the opposition continues to say as it misleads the public.

The removal of a monopoly will allow farmers to sell their wheat and barley directly to a processor, whether it be a pasta manufacturer, a flour mill or another processing plant.

As Alberta farmer Paul Schoorlemmer said:

It will allow individual farmers to do secondary processing, mixed marketing and those types of things that were not really practical under the old system.

Grain farmers in western Canada and right across this country have a bright future, and we stand with them. Our government is

committed to the continued success of Canadian agriculture. We are pulling out all the stops to help make sure Canadian farmers succeed and to build a strong future for the sector as a whole.

Farmers are the key economic driver in this country, and that is why we put farmers first in every decision we make on agriculture. Our formula is simple, and it works: we listen to our farmers, we work with farmers, and then we deliver the practical results farmers need.

Canadian farmers have proven time and time again that they can compete and succeed in the global marketplace if they have a level playing field. That is why the government has been working very hard to build new opportunities in global markets for our farmers. We have been on the road a lot in our efforts to build trade relations, and they are paying off.

The agriculture minister has led trade missions to key markets in Europe, Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East. Working closely with the industry, we have completed over 30 international trade missions and returned home with some real tangible results for our farmers, producers and processors. Everywhere we go, we are finding new customers who want to buy Canada's safe, high-quality foodstuffs. Together we have been moving a lot of product and have delivered some real results for our farmers and processors.

The government knows farmers want to make their living in the marketplace. That is why we have gotten out on the world stage, whether it is serving up Canadian steak at the Winter Olympics in Vancouver or canola oil in Mexico, to make sure our farmers can connect with new customers.

Canada has a lot to be proud of. Canada is rich in land and resources. We have the expertise in science and innovation. We export our high-quality, safe, delicious foods all over the world. We have dedicated farmers and processors to help us continue our long-standing proven tradition of delivering an abundance of top-quality food and food products to the world. These qualities are important assets as we look to the future.

Farmers appreciate the agriculture minister's hard work on their behalf. They understand that agricultural trade is critical to Canada's economy and prosperity.

Overall, Canada's agriculture, food and seafood exports surpassed \$39 billion in 2010. That is the second-highest level in history, and it puts us in the top five global agrifood exporters.

Government Orders

● (1345)

That is huge. Those dollars mean jobs and livelihoods for Canadians. That is why, when we as a government take measures to support agricultural trade, we are not just helping farmers but all Canadians. Agriculture has proven time and time again its contribution to Canada's economic recovery and will continue to do so, especially as we succeed in breaking down barriers to trade.

Canada is working on all fronts to boost our agricultural business in the world. We know that buyers and consumers already think highly of Canadians and Canadian products. We want to raise awareness and boost the appetite for our great Canadian agriculture products. Opening and expanding markets around the world creates opportunities for our producers to drive the Canadian economy.

There are challenges facing the industry, but the long-term signs are positive. During this time of global economic uncertainty, we have to maximize trade opportunities on the world stage. We have to provide every opportunity for our farmers to succeed, which includes this great step forward—and it is forward—to give western Canadian wheat farmers and barley farmers the freedom they have asked for and deserve.

Removing the single desk monopoly helps not only farmers: it helps all Canadians by creating jobs and prosperity. I urge members to support the bill and to understand that timely passage will help give farmers the certainty they need to plan their business for the coming year.

● (1350)

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my hon. colleague's comments and I cannot help but wonder, if he has such confidence in the overall system, why the Conservatives did not have a full referendum vote on it, rather than playing the "we know better than everybody else". This way there would not be this immense division, which continues to grow.

I have had more than a dozen phone calls this morning on this issue. It would have been helpful in the overall mission that the government is on if it had held a referendum and truly heard from 100% of the people who are going to be affected.

Why is the government afraid to do that?

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I beg to differ. We did have a plebiscite on May 2, and it was called the national election. By the way, we have a majority.

Opposition members often quote a plebiscite that was supposedly an accurate collection of the farmers' thoughts. My uncle and cousin farm in Manitoba. They farm grain and they did not even get a ballot. They were not even able to vote in the plebiscite.

We know on this side of the House that the plebiscite has a lot of issues and is an inaccurate representation of the views of Canadian farmers.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a plebiscite, an election, is not just about the Canadian Wheat Board.

Canadians need to be reminded that the Canadian Wheat Board was created in the 1920s and was formally implemented in 1935 by farmers, for farmers. This board is entirely run and funded by farmers. Taxpayers do not contribute any money to this organization, as they do to crown corporations. This board is not a crown corporation. What is the government doing?

[*English*]

Mr. Bob Zimmer: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned the inaccuracies of the plebiscites held in the past by the Canadian Wheat Board. They do not support the numbers of 62%. They just are not accurate. Again I will mention my uncle and cousin, who farm in Manitoba and were not allowed to vote because they had not been given a ballot. There are a lot of issues with that.

The B.C. grain growers group overwhelming said it supports our legislation to move the Wheat Board forward into the 21st century.

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I could not agree with my colleague more when it comes to the Wheat Board.

At home we farm about 3,000 acres. I have a son who is looking after it at the present time. He is still combining and trying to get the crop off, but he asks me why he is getting a world price for canola outside the board but not getting a world price for wheat, which is in the board.

I would like to know what my colleague would say to my son and I would like to ask that question to the opposition. Obviously none of those members actually farms wheat or canola and understands exactly what is happening at the farm gate. The real question should be how much the Wheat Board is costing at the farm gate today, because it is very significant.

Could my colleague come up with an answer that would satisfy my son?

● (1355)

Mr. Bob Zimmer: That is an easy one, Mr. Speaker. We talked about it. I asked the hon. member of the opposition sits on the agriculture committee. We have not seen the same issues with canola and other crops that are on the open market. They simply are making money. In my neck of the woods in northern B.C. canola and other crops are making money. Farmers have shifted away from grain because it is so difficult to operate within the Canadian Wheat Board structure.

I would like to tell the member a personal story. I would likely be a farmer today because I wanted to be a farmer as a kid, but it just simply was not doable in the grain market as my family has continued on with in Manitoba. Hopefully it is coming soon.

Mr. Earl Dreessen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand in support of this important and timely legislation for western Canadian grain farmers.

I would also like to thank the member for Prince George—Peace River for sharing his time with me today.

Statements by Members

Our government has always promised western Canadian wheat and barley growers that they would be given market freedom. With this legislation, we are delivering on that promise. We live in a democratic country and we believe that western Canadian grain farmers deserve the same freedom as farmers in other parts of Canada and around the world.

I will outline what this new legislation will mean for western grain farmers.

In the June 2011 Speech from the Throne, our government reiterated its commitment to ensure that western farmers have the freedom to sell wheat and barley on the open market. With this proposed legislation, we aim to provide marketing choice to western wheat and barley farmers. To avoid market disruptions, the goal is for farmers and grain marketers to be able to start forward contracting for the 2012-13 crop year well in advance of August 1, 2012.

This bill would remove the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board and allow for the Canadian Wheat Board to continue as a voluntary marketing organization for up to five years as it makes the transition to full private ownership.

The Canadian Wheat Board will finally have the opportunity to become owned and operated by farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board will continue to offer farmers the option of pooling their crops. It will continue to benefit from a borrowing guarantee backed by the federal government. It will develop a business plan for privatization, which will be reviewed by the Minister of Agriculture no later than 2016.

During our extensive consultations, industry raised a number of valid issues around transition. We are taking these concerns seriously.

First, on the issue of the voluntary Canadian Wheat Board's access to elevators, ports and terminals, we expect grain handlers will be competing vigorously for grain volume in an open market, so they will want to handle the grain that is marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Curt Vossen, president of Richardson International Limited said that the end of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is "going to open up 20 to 25 million new tonnes of marketing opportunities for companies inside and outside Canada". This will mean more companies competing for farmers' grain, which is the good news for farmers. Our staged approach will provide the necessary checks and balances to help ensure a smooth transition, taking corrective action if needed.

Second, on the issue of producers' continued access to producer cars, the right to producer cars is protected in the Canada Grain Act. The Canadian Grain Commission allocates these cars to producers, and this will not change with marketing freedom.

Currently, the Canadian Wheat Board manages the marketing of grain shipped in producer cars so that shipments are related to a sale. Under the new rules, producers and short lines will be able to make commercial agreements and arrangements with grain companies or the voluntary Canadian Wheat Board to market their grain.

Stephen Vandervalk, president of the Grain Growers of Canada, believes "You'll see more and more producer cars because it's like a specialty crop as far as quality and contracting directly with the farmer. It has very little to do with the Canadian Wheat Board".

Short line railways are expecting some adjustments as they will have more options of marketing partners for the grain volumes they can attract from producers. However, Sheldon Affleck, president of Big Sky Rail, believes that "The flexibility of a short line should provide improved service that will attract grain".

Third, these changes will not change the Canadian Grain Commission's role in assuring the world renowned quality of Canada's grain.

•(1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Excuse me for interrupting the hon. member for Red Deer. He will have six minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, local grain farmers in my riding, such as the BC Grain Producers Association, have made it clear that they want the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other Canadian farmers. Our nation's grain farmers feed the world and they deserve the opportunity to decide when, where and how they sell their product.

With the introduction of Bill C-18, we no longer would see those same western Canadian grain farmers go to jail for selling their grain across our borders. Our Canadian government believes in marketing freedom for all Canadian grain farmers. I, for one, am in full support of our legislation to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board. I hope all of us in the House will support the bill. It all can be summed up into one word, "freedom".

* * *

[Translation]

PENSIONS

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, right now, there are too many seniors with inadequate pensions in my riding and in other ridings across Canada.

For these people, a strong pension plan would mean the difference between living well and merely surviving. For retirees, financial planning is key. To have one's pension plan cut by up to 40% after 30 years of service is unacceptable. It is unfair.

Statements by Members

Under the existing Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act, creditors are paid before employee pensions. This does not make any sense. I hope that this Parliament will be able to keep future retirees out of poverty by revitalizing the Canada pension plan. Only the CPP can save people from poverty when they retire.

An amendment to the Companies' Creditors Arrangement Act, as the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek proposed earlier this week, would truly put money in the wallets of those in need across the country and help keep them out of poverty. These people deserve to live well, not just survive.

* * *

[English]

BUSINESS EXCELLENCE AWARD

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small and medium-sized businesses are the backbone of our Canadian economy. Nowhere is that more true than in Newmarket—Aurora. Entrepreneurs there are creating jobs and are a vital part of our community's fabric.

Today, I would like to recognize the 2011 Business Excellence Award winners from my riding.

From the Newmarket Chamber of Commerce, I congratulate the following: Roadhouse and Rose Funeral Home; Mr. Janitorial Supplies; Neptune Innovations; Keller Williams Realty; Tim Hortons; Warden Restoration; Rose of Sharon Services for Young Mothers; and Stephen Kearley of Benson, Kearley Insurance Brokers.

From the Aurora Chamber of Commerce, I congratulate the following: Rent Source Tools Etc. Mini Bins; Simply Yummy Bakery; Comport Aerospace Services; Robinson's Karate Schools; Park Place Manor; Longo's Aurora; Carcone's Auto Recycling; and Peter van Schaik of Van-Rob.

Congratulations to all on a job well done.

* * *

DAVID Y.H. LUI

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to a cultural icon in Vancouver, David Y.H. Lui, who passed away last month.

David was a B.C. boy. Born in Vancouver in 1944, David attended Kitsilano Secondary School and, later, UBC. From a young age, David was interested in ballet, but it was in university where that interest really took hold.

The man with the flowing cape, as he was known, made Vancouver a destination for world-class artists. His David Y.H. Lui Dance spectacular series brought artists like Martha Graham, Alvin Ailey, the Joffrey Ballet and Shirley MacLaine to Vancouver.

David was the head of the arts community, a prominent member for more than 40 years. He built the David Y.H. Lui Theatre in 1975, co-founded Ballet BC and BC Arts Council and was board member of the Canada Council where he pushed for a multicultural arts scene.

Canada's artistic community has not only lost a great visionary and advocate, but a dear friend. On behalf of the Liberal Party of Canada, I offer sincere condolences to David's friends and family. A celebration of David's life will be held at The Playhouse in Vancouver on October 23.

* * *

• (1405)

PARLIAMENTARY FITNESS INITIATIVE

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to remind fellow members of the parliamentary fitness initiative intended to make each member healthier personally and in the process better role models as parliamentarians.

Members are invited early Tuesday mornings to run or walk and swim on Thursdays, with the highest calibre volunteer coaches. For cyclists, their fitness initiative team recently secured indoor shelters on Parliament Hill.

The aim is not at high performance athletes, but at every member and, more important, at every Canadian represented through us from across our great country. Every step we take is a step in the right direction at a time when, as a nation, we Canadians need to confront childhood obesity, diabetes and other consequences of unhealthy lifestyles.

All Canadians like to see members work together in common cause for the benefit of the whole country. That is why colleagues for Etobicoke North and Sackville—Eastern Shore are working with me on this initiative, and I thank them for their support.

Let us join together Canadians of every measure of ability to make Canada the healthiest place on earth.

* * *

[Translation]

MONTREAL METROPOLITAN AREA

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, later this evening, on behalf of the 28 NDP members from the Montreal metropolitan area, a colleague and I will be presenting a submission entitled "Putting a human face on our metropolis: towards a green, sustainable and prosperous Montreal metropolitan area" as part of a public consultation process.

As representatives of our constituents and in the spirit of co-operation with all levels of government, we wanted to share our thoughts and contribute to these public consultations. This submission is the product of a collective effort. We hope it will add to the plan and help it come to fruition.

The NDP members from Quebec want to play an active role in partnership projects and plans for the future. Residents and community stakeholders want the Montreal metropolitan area to finally have a coherent and comprehensive plan that respects the diversity and wealth of the land, facilitates travel, and contributes to the economic and social development of the region in a sustainable manner.

Statements by Members

[English]

ELDRED KING

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this was a sad week for residents of York Region. Over the weekend, Eldred King, former mayor and York Region chair, lost his battle with illness and passed away at the age of 84.

Mr. King lived a full life as a leader, mentor, husband and father. He was an extraordinary individual who dedicated much of his life to our community. He guided us through a period of tremendous change and was a towering figure in helping to make our community the extraordinary place it is today.

Wednesday was a difficult day as we officially said goodbye to Mr. King. He was a prominent man in many people's lives. For me, he was the first to support my decision to seek public office. His advice was instrumental. He helped me truly understand the importance of maintaining rural heritage in the face of dramatic growth.

We owe a huge debt of gratitude to Mr. King for his work in helping shape Markham, Stouffville and York Region.

On behalf of my family and my entire team, I pass on my sincere condolences to his wife, Beulah, and sons Jeff, Rod and Jan.

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BAY OF FUNDY

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in the House in March, the Bay of Fundy is Canada's finalist in a prestigious global campaign to identify the New 7 Wonders of Nature. I am pleased that other colleagues have spoken in Parliament in support of the Bay of Fundy.

Time is running out and we need the help of all Canadians. Our Bay of Fundy belongs in the company of other prestigious finalists, like the Grand Canyon, the Great Barrier Reef and the Galapagos Islands.

The top New 7 Wonders of Nature will be announced on November 11, just three weeks away. A win for the Bay of Fundy would have huge significance for Canada on a global scale. It may be one of the best known destinations in the world.

I am once again asking all members of the House to support this initiative and encourage their constituents to vote for the Bay online and by text. With the help of Canadians, we can ensure that on November 11, Canadians will be proud to hear the Bay of Fundy be declared one of the New 7 Wonders of Nature.

A vote for the Bay of Fundy is a vote for Canada.

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•(1410)

[Translation]

BINATIONAL HEALTH WEEK

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge the exceptional work of the organizers of the 11th Binational Health Week in Montreal.

This event is one of the largest mobilization efforts of federal and provincial government agencies, community-based organizations and volunteers in North America.

Through this effort, the consulates general of Colombia, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico and Peru invite people from their countries to contribute positively to their communities and improve their health.

I want to congratulate all those who make this positive initiative possible, and I encourage them to continue their amazing contribution to Quebec and Canadian society.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, members will be shocked to know that the CBC has not corrected the record on its misleading report from Monday night. It failed to inform Canadians about the drug treatment court exemption in our government's safe streets and communities act.

Today the Quebec Bar Association confirmed that it supports the important drug treatment court exemption in Bill C-10 for those who are seeking treatment for their addictions.

Police chiefs have confirmed that drugs are the primary currency of violent criminal organizations. Fire chiefs have confirmed that grow ops and meth labs constitute a significant threat to the health of Canadian communities.

Bill C-10 is clear. If individuals do this criminal activity, they will pay with jail time. It is time the opposition parties across listened to the front line experts and supported our efforts.

Canadians are concerned about crime and the experts agree. Bill C-10 targets organized crime while providing treatment options for those addicted to drugs. I call on the CBC today to apologize, to correct the record, and to stop misleading Canadians.

* * *

BULLYING

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize October 20 as Spirit Day, a day started in 2010 by Canadian teenager Brittany McMillan to remember the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and questioning youth lost to suicide.

Many of us are wearing purple today in their memory and as a way to draw attention to the need for action. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among teens and homophobic bullying often plays a significant role in these tragic losses.

I want to applaud the efforts of the purple letter campaign in B.C. which has collected thousands of letters urging the provincial government to adopt an anti-bullying campaign in every school.

Statements by Members

I would also like to draw attention to the efforts of Ottawa youth who are dealing with the loss of a friend this week by holding a vigil tonight at 7:30 p.m. at the Human Rights Monument.

Beyond wearing purple today, we also need to take action to bring an end to suicides caused by homophobic bullying. We need to ensure that youth have the supports they need, so that no one is left feeling that suicide is the only option. We need to listen to the calls from youth to make things better now. Yes, for most it will get better, but some feel they cannot wait.

We need a national suicide prevention program and we need to ensure youth have access to supports like gay straight alliances in their schools. Let Spirit Day move us closer to these goals.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY

Mr. Bernard Trottier (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leadership candidate from Skeena—Bulkley Valley is proposing non-compete deals with the Liberals in government-held ridings.

After seeing the candidates the NDP has run over the years in various ridings, does this show this member's lack of faith in his party's ability to find quality candidates for office?

The member for Winnipeg Centre backed this idea. There has even been support within their caucus for an outright merger.

[*Translation*]

While our government is focusing on what is important to Canadians—job creation and economic growth—the NDP is looking at who could defeat our members. The NDP is splintered in these difficult times.

This week, NDP spokespersons contradicted one another on the issue of a coalition with the Liberals. These are disturbing examples that show that the NDP is too weak and divided to govern.

* * *

[*English*]

COMMUNITY LEADERS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this year Kings—Hants is home to a trifecta of great Canadians providing effective leadership to three prominent national organizations.

Trinda Ernst is the president of the Canadian Bar Association; Dr. Robert MacGregor is president of the Canadian Dental Association; and Peter Clarke is president of the Egg Farmers of Canada.

Trinda Ernst is the fifth woman to lead the CBA and practises with Waterbury Newton in Kentville, Nova Scotia. She is a graduate of Dalhousie University.

Dr. MacGregor has practised in Kentville for almost 30 years and is a graduate of both Acadia University and Dalhousie University.

Peter Clarke is a well-respected member of the Nova Scotian agricultural community and operates an egg farm in the Annapolis Valley. He is also a recipient of the Order of Nova Scotia.

I congratulate these three fine citizens for their leadership in their communities and national organizations, for their leadership within Canada, and for their dedicated public service to all of us.

* * *

• (1415)

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on what matters most to Canadians; that is, creating jobs and economic growth.

Yesterday, the shipbuilding secretariat announced its decision. The national shipbuilding strategy is a win for all of Canada that will create thousands of new jobs and billions in economic growth in cities and communities across this great country.

Unfortunately, as non-partisan public servants were explaining the process that was based on merit and run at arm's length, free from political involvement, the leader of the NDP was calling for political intervention in the process.

Let us remember that the NDP members voted against this procurement, and now they want political interference in a plan they never supported. This contradictory position from the NDP is another worrying example of its lack of understanding of how Canada works.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HOMELESSNESS AWARENESS NIGHT

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NPD): Mr. Speaker, on Friday, October 21, the 22nd homelessness awareness night will take place in 25 Quebec cities. The theme is poverty. This event raises awareness of the fact that, every night, whether it is 20°C or -20°C, people sleep in the streets and sometimes die of hunger and cold.

One in every six Quebecers believes that he or she could become homeless. This event is an outdoor vigil for solidarity where street people and ordinary citizens spend some time together enjoying various activities and entertainment. I commend the initiative of the agencies that organize this event and that struggle every year to make ends meet and to help the disadvantaged, even though they receive inadequate funding.

I am taking this opportunity to share my dream with you. I hope that one day we will no longer hold such events because there will be no more homeless people.

Join us on October 21, from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m., to put an end to isolation and indifference, fight prejudice against homeless people and eliminate a problem that can happen to anyone.

Oral Questions

[English]

MARKETING FREEDOM

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is focused on what really matters to Canadians; that is, creating jobs and economic growth.

Instead of working with us, the NDP caucus members have become so disunited that they are contradicting each other on important issues that are important to Canada, and particularly, western Canada.

Yesterday, the NDP leader tried to argue, wrongly, that Parliament could not amend legislation that would give farmers marketing freedom.

One of her own colleagues, the member Winnipeg Centre, said that he actually did not buy her argument.

Now, I seldom agree with him, but on this one I do. In fact, he recognized that our legislation can give farmers the freedom that they are asking for. Unfortunately, his leader does not agree with him.

This contradictory position from the NDP is just yet another worrying example of how weak and disunited the NDP is and that it is nowhere even close to being fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the NDP shipbuilding critic from Sackville—Eastern Shore, along with myself and all New Democrats celebrate with the workers of Nova Scotia and British Columbia, but for other workers yesterday's announcement came up \$2 billion short. Instead of announcing the full \$35 billion in contracts, the government picked winners and losers.

The Prime Minister left major shipyards like Davie vulnerable. Why?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the leader of the NDP has chosen at the last hour to criticize the process, the fact of the matter is this. The NDP member of Parliament for Louis-Hébert said, "We would like to ensure that all the processes are clear and transparent and we recognize that that is the case here".

In the case of the NDP member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, he said, "We are very pleased and we congratulate the government on that process".

This is a process that will result in enormous benefit not just for the shipbuilders that won the contracts yesterday but for all of the shipbuilding industry and all of the Canadian economy.

● (1420)

[Translation]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister cannot completely wash his hands of this matter. The government did not make public how the bids were evaluated. Workers in Lévis do not know why they did not get anything. The government did not explain why there is not enough work for three shipyards if there is enough for two.

When will a maritime strategy be developed so that our shipyards can reap the benefits of continuing demand and stable employment and avoid boom and bust cycles?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP's position is completely contradictory. The member for Louis-Hébert said, "We would like to ensure that all the processes are clear and transparent and we recognize that that is the case here." The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore said, "I am confident that this is fair. To this point, nothing has led me to believe that there has been any political interference. We are very pleased and we congratulate the government on that process."

The government has a program that will benefit not only the shipyards selected yesterday, but also the entire industry, taxpayers and the Canadian economy.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we agree and everyone agrees that the awarding of government contracts should not be a partisan process. This should be true not only for shipbuilding contracts, but also for those related to fighter jets and G8 gazebos. That being said, the government must put in place a Canada-wide strategy to develop the shipbuilding industry.

When will Davie workers have the opportunity to reap the benefits of such a strategy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP voted against this shipbuilding program and now NDP members are contradicting each other on the process.

[English]

The position on our side is, of course, completely clear. These are great initiatives not just for the shipbuilding industry but for the Canadian economy.

New Democrats have to get together and work out their policy on the other side. Meanwhile, we will get on with making sure that shipbuilding and the Canadian economy move forward.

[Translation]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since 1829, the Davie shipyard has been an economic driving force in the Quebec City region. It has gone through good times and bad, but it has always endured. It helped make Canada a naval power. Today, the shipyard is offering its services to the Canadian government through a consortium that has the expertise and ability to perform. This government maintains that the selection process was open, fair and competitive.

If that is the case, Quebec wants to know what made the difference in how the contracts were awarded.

Oral Questions

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am curious to find out why the member has not spoken to the NDP shipbuilding critic because he himself said yesterday that this was a great day for all of Canada. I agree with him because this shipbuilding contract will create more than 15,000 jobs across Canada in all regions and revitalize the marine industry.

Let us remember that Davie and all other shipyards across the country are welcome to bid on the construction of 100 smaller ships that have been set aside and the winners announced yesterday are not allowed to bid on those.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for the past 182 years, the Davie shipyard has been at the forefront of marine technology. The Davie shipyard and its consortium offer a unique opportunity for its national and international expertise to contribute to the development of the Canadian marine industry.

In the context of this procurement strategy, would it not have been possible, as the former Conservative public works minister, Michael Fortier, suggested yesterday, to use the potential offered by the Davie shipyard consortium to revive this Canadian industry?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, Davie along with other shipyards are welcome to bid on the construction of over 100 smaller ships that have been set aside for national competition. In addition to that, there is also billions of dollars in maintenance work to be done for decades to come that Davie and other shipyards can also compete for.

I should just mention that John Dewar, the vice-president of Upper Lakes Group which now owns Davie in Ontario, said that the federal government bent over backwards to try and eliminate any political interference or manipulation of the results.

* * *

•(1425)

[*Translation*]

SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the small business federation has been clear about the fact that taxes on employment kill jobs.

I have a simple question for the Prime Minister: in light of the current difficult economic situation in Europe and in the United States—we are seeing signs of a recession—why not freeze taxes on employment now and ensure that people are not contributing to killing jobs in Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised by this question from the leader of the Liberal Party because that party voted against tax cuts for small and medium-sized enterprises in Canada.

This government has a clear objective: to keep taxes low. Obviously, it is an essential aspect of our plan for the Canadian economy, a plan that continues to create jobs.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has an opportunity to do something very direct and very simple. I asked a question the other day for which he did not give a direct answer. The tax credits in the budget currently being discussed in committee are not refundable. Some people do not pay taxes because they are too poor. Why not make the tax credits refundable, for example, those for caregivers and volunteer firefighters? These are good examples of what could be done for the least fortunate in—

The Speaker: The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the leader of the Liberal Party is trying to justify his opposition to tax cuts for the Canadian economy. In the bill before Parliament there are significant tax cuts for SMEs, for families and for individuals. I encourage the leader of the Liberal Party to do the right thing and support these tax cuts.

* * *

[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): There was no answer there, Mr. Speaker.

I have another question for the Prime Minister. If he can have a fairness officer rendering an opinion, if he can have a competition which is non-partisan, if he can have a process which is generally seen as being fair and objective when it comes to the shipbuilding contracts, why can the government not see the logic of doing the same thing with respect to the purchase of several billion dollars' worth of new fighter jets for this country? That contract is a fiasco. The government has numbers which no one believes. There is no fairness opinion. There is no objective opinion, and there is no—

The Speaker: Order. The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course one of the elements of such a transparent, non-partisan and fair process is we do not re-open it later.

The fact of the matter is the previous Liberal government was part of an international process to select an aircraft company to develop the fifth generation fighter. That is obviously why this government is proceeding in that way.

The leader of the Liberal Party of course was not a member of the Liberal Party at the time, so he may not remember that.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

SHIPBUILDING

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many people are trying to understand today why this government did not want to distribute the \$35 billion in shipbuilding contracts more fairly. There should not be winners and losers when we are awarding contracts. Yesterday, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services boasted that it was a historic day for all regions of Canada.

How is the government's announcement great news for workers at the Davie shipyard?

• (1430)

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the NDP shipbuilding critic once again, because I think what he said yesterday was true. He said that yesterday was a great day for all of Canada. I agree with him.

I also agree with the president and CEO of Canadian Manufacturers & Exporters, who said:

Beyond the benefits for the winning companies and their workers, the shipbuilding contracts will have profound benefits for the entire economy, coast-to-coast. We congratulate the government on a fair and transparent process that will maximize opportunity for participation and growth throughout all regions of Canada....

[Translation]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, shipbuilding is a key, strategic industry in our country and it must remain stable. Unfortunately, the shipbuilding industry in Quebec is vulnerable right now. After 182 years of existence, the Davie shipyard is in a fragile position.

I would like to know how the Minister of Veterans Affairs, member for Lévis—Bellechasse, plans on reassuring the people of Lévis and Quebec City. In light of all of the jobs that have been lost, what is the government's economic development plan for the greater Quebec City area?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we cannot underestimate enough the opportunities that come out of the national shipbuilding strategy for all regions, and in fact for the entire marine sector, including Davie Canada.

Davie yards along with other shipyards across the country are welcome to bid on the construction of over 100 smaller ships that have been set aside for national competition, which are excluded from the two winners yesterday.

In addition, there will be billions of dollars in maintenance work to be done for decades to come, and of course, they are welcome to bid on those contracts as well.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence calls the process for shipbuilding contracts bulletproof.

Will the minister now admit his gamble on F-35 jets is riddled with holes? Conservatives are ready to spend billions without a single competitive bid.

Is the cost per jet \$65 million or \$148 million? Canadians do not know. The Associate Minister of National Defence does not know. The Minister of National Defence does not know.

If the process was fair for shipbuilding, why do we not have the same for jets?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, applaud the fair and transparent way in which the national shipbuilding procurement was awarded.

On the F-35s, I remind the member opposite that the extensive and rigorous competitive process took place and it happened under the previous Liberal government. Now the Liberal members in this House have cold feet about the program they started.

The F-35s will provide our men and women in uniform with the best equipment to do their jobs and return home to their families, as we have supported them during their campaign in Libya.

[Translation]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that about 20 public servants made sure that the shipbuilding contracts were awarded as fairly as possible, primarily because the Conservatives were not involved in the decision-making process. In the meantime, the government is stubbornly wanting to award a \$30 billion contract for the F-35s without any kind of framework or bidding process.

Why is it that what is good for shipbuilding is not good for our air force?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the previous answer applies. I am sorry that the member was not listening.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the Prairies the Conservatives are attacking the livelihood of farmers. On the west and east coasts, the fisheries are their target.

The Conservatives' decision to cut the Department of Fisheries and Oceans shows they are completely out of touch with the needs of fishing communities.

The government's buddies on Bay Street cannot feed Canadian families. Why do the Conservatives have it in for Canada's primary producers?

Oral Questions

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the strategic review was an opportunity for the department to assess the performance of its programs. It also allowed us to ensure that we are responding to the priorities of Canadians. DFO is making steady progress in modernizing and improving our program and policy approaches to meet the needs of Canadians today and in the future.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know the government prefers to make decisions based on ideology rather than science, statistics or facts, but the Conservatives' cuts to DFO have gone too far. Cutting the science branch means making decisions with nothing to back them up. Cutting the resource conservation councils means fishermen have no say. Cutting search and rescue means lives are actually put at risk.

Can the minister explain exactly what will be left, what he will be in charge of once he is finished scuttling his department?

• (1435)

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a multitude of questions from the member opposite.

We will have a more efficient, more effective department which will deal with the needs of fishers on the east coast, the west coast and in northern Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, fishermen from the Pacific coast all the way to the Grand Banks of Newfoundland—including the Gaspé and the Îles-de-la-Madeleine—are worried. Their livelihood, their way of life and their safety are being jeopardized by the cuts to Fisheries and Oceans Canada. The government is making cuts to research, management and rescue without thinking about the consequences.

Why has the government abandoned fishermen?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the contrary is the truth. The government has demonstrated a strong commitment to science at Fisheries and Oceans since 2006, including \$30 million to upgrade 13 laboratories at sites across the country, and \$36 million to construct three new science vessels. This government has been focused on marine science. We have invested \$14 million to complete mapping and data collection in the Atlantic and Arctic oceans for Canada's submission to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, and \$9.7 million in science to support emerging commercial fishing—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is clearly disconnected from the reality of fishers. We even wonder whether the government is still interested in the future of the fishery. If it is, then why abolish the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council? Canadians rely on Fisheries and Oceans Canada to make decisions based on science, as well as on those who know best: the fishers themselves.

How can the government manage the fisheries without any expert advice? Is it throwing in the towel?

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the FRCC and the PFRCC have historically served an important role. Activities, however, have been replaced with other approaches, such as industry participation in stock assessments and the development of integrated fisheries management plans through advisory committees. In fact, council members are quoted as saying that there will not be a huge gap created.

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SALMON FISHERY

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after the discovery of infectious salmon anemia in two wild sockeye smolts, U.S. federal agencies are preparing an emergency research effort into this threat of their wild, hatchery and farmed salmon. This is the single most feared virus in the fish industry. The U.S. recognizes the urgent need to protect its coastal economy and jobs, but the Canadian government is mute. Does it not understand the scale of this new threat? When will the minister tell Canadians exactly what emergency action he will take?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, stringent federal regulations are in place to protect Canada's aquatic species from disease. Infectious salmon anemia, ISA, has never been found in B.C. aquaculture salmon. Fisheries and Oceans Canada in the Pacific region has been testing wild sockeye salmon for ISA. In fact, 300 samples tested this year have all tested negative.

At this time the reported finding the member refers to is far from conclusive. Fisheries and Oceans Canada will conduct testing in the national ISA reference laboratory.

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VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are shortchanging our brave veterans by cutting more than \$200 million from their budget.

Today at committee the Liberals fought back and won a small victory for the vets. Our motion to study these massive cuts passed because Conservative members did not show up to the veterans affairs committee on time today to defeat it.

Oral Questions

Would the minister commit to appear at committee and explain why he is cutting support to our veterans, and will he be on time?

• (1440)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our veterans have been winning massively for six years with the Conservative government.

If the member wants to get the number right, \$500 million times six gives \$3 billion to our veterans and \$2 billion with the new veterans charter. If the member wants to help our veterans, he must sit up in his chair when we are improving budget initiatives for our veterans.

We are on the side of veterans.

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CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is killing the Canadian Wheat Board. This is going to destroy family farms. It is going to hurt rural communities.

Let me quote *The Economist*:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies. Eventually, this should lead to consolidation and fewer, bigger farms—making Canada a more competitive wheat producer, but devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

Why is the Prime Minister causing so much damage to our—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Agriculture.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the predictions of *The Economist* will only come true if we maintain the status quo.

That is why we are moving to marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers, so that they can start developing processing right there in those small rural communities and develop a broader base and a better business plan. That will return more money to them and keep those smaller farms and communities alive and vibrant.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, barely finished butchering the Canadian Wheat Board, the Conservatives have already set their sights on supply management.

Yesterday, the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands said, “We want to provide the same freedom for farmers right across the country”. Who other can he be referring to than the supply managed agriculture sectors in Canada? Conservatives keep musing about the demise of supply management. The final pleas from family farms across the west fell on deaf ears.

Could the minister forecast when his attack on dairy, egg and poultry farms across the rest of Canada will begin?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There needs to be a lot more order during the questions and answers. I can barely hear the question. I will allow the hon. minister to answer, but we need more order.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): You are right, Mr. Speaker, it was loud, but it was not clear.

This government is well respected by the supply management sector as we reciprocate and respect it for the great job it is doing. We are the only party that listed supply management support in our last campaign platform. We brought it forward in our throne speech. Those members voted against it. What a bunch of hypocrites.

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CANADA POST

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of State for Transport avoided the question yesterday when asked about cuts to Canada Post in Quebec. Perhaps if I ask the question in English, he might understand the question better. Cuts elsewhere were between 4% and 8%. In Quebec, it chose to cut an alarming 53%.

What is the minister doing to stop these unfair and unbalanced cuts that target just one province?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, what I say is true in English and true in French.

All permanent jobs at Canada Post are protected. Our government is committed to ensuring high quality mail service to all Canadians and businesses. Operating decisions at Canada Post are made by Canada Post.

I hope this member will appreciate Canada Post and not get into mudslinging. It is beneath him really.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's vague answers show us at least one thing: he has no argument to justify the unfair treatment of Quebec. Postal service is essential across the country. There is no justification for treating a province this way. I repeat: the cuts in Quebec are 53%. Elsewhere in the country the cuts range between 4% and 8%.

Does the minister not think that every province is entitled to the same service from Canada Post?

Oral Questions

● (1445)

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member when he says postal services are essential to Canada. That is why I was very concerned when his party, last spring, went to all sorts of effort to prevent Canada Post from allowing Canadians to receive the mail. The member and his party created a historic filibuster to support their big union bosses to prevent Canadians from getting the mail.

Really, Canada Post is essential. I wish the hon. member would help ensure that Canada Post and all Canadians can reach their full potential.

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[*Translation*]**ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY**

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is continuing his attack on Atlantic Canadian families. First he made cuts to search and rescue, then to Fisheries and Oceans Canada.

Yesterday we learned that the axe will fall on the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. Atlantic Canadian families count on ACOA.

Why is this government punishing the Atlantic region?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency announced that 42 positions would be eliminated, but small businesses and communities in the Atlantic will not be the least bit affected in terms of the programs and services they receive. It will have no impact on them, nor on the extraordinary opportunity announced yesterday that will see thousands of jobs created in the Atlantic region and across Canada through our naval strategy.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ACOA serves four provinces in Atlantic Canada, and 100 of the 800 positions at the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency are being eliminated, the latest victims of the government's approach to job 100.

Since 2006, Conservatives have cut ACOA's budget by a whopping 30%. ACOA is vital to economic development and job creation in Atlantic Canada, and cutting it will kill jobs.

Why are the Conservatives jeopardizing the future of our region with these reckless cuts to ACOA, which helps job creation?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, these are not reckless cuts. This is streamlining the operation to give better service and better programs to Atlantic Canadians out of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency.

These 42 positions that will be eliminated will not take away from the services being provided to entrepreneurs and communities in Atlantic Canada, nor will they take away from the extraordinary opportunities that we got yesterday out of the Conservative government's naval strategy.

PORT OF CHURCHILL

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we witnessed a bizarre spectacle in the House when the NDP member for Churchill spoke out against the positive announcements our government made for the Port of Churchill in her riding.

Unlike that member, our government understands the importance of the Port of Churchill as a valuable asset. Despite the NDP, the Port of Churchill will remain the Prairies-Arctic gateway to the world.

Would the Minister of Agriculture please outline the help that the NDP member for Churchill is opposed to her constituents receiving?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member for Brandon—Souris is supportive of the actions our government continues to take to help northern Manitoba.

This government will continue to support Churchill. Building on the \$38 million this government committed in previous budgets, we at Agriculture Canada will provide \$5 million per year, for the next five years, to incent more than just Wheat Board grains moving up the railway to Churchill. That is a great initiative. Transport Canada will provide an additional \$4 million, over three years, to strengthen the infrastructure at the port.

The people of Churchill are hoping that their NDP member does not vote no again.

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● (1450)

[*Translation*]**THE ECONOMY**

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian index of well-being, published by the University of Waterloo, shows increasing inequality in Canada under this government. The benefits of economic growth are not evenly distributed. The top 1% of income earners benefited from 30% of the economic growth and Canadian families have a higher level of debt than ever before.

Why are the Conservatives offering such generous tax breaks to the banks, while leaving Canadian families to fend for themselves?

[*English*]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike the NDP opposition, we believe the best social program is a job. Canadian families want jobs, not higher taxes that kill jobs, like the \$10 billion tax increase that was in the NDP platform in the last election.

Oral Questions

We have created about 650,000 net new jobs in Canada since the end of the recession, 90% being full-time jobs and almost 80% in the private sector. Those jobs support employment in our country which supports the quality of life of Canadian families.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, that is cold Conservative comfort for Canadians. It is not much of an answer.

The Conservatives' stubborn insistence on slashing taxes for profitable corporations is just another gift to wealthy CEOs and shareholders. It increases inequality and does nothing to help the 99%. Experts keep telling the government that there is no economic logic to such a policy.

Will the minister please explain to struggling Canadian families why CEOs come before them?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the NDP please explain to the Canadian people why it voted against the working income tax benefit to help people get off social assistance and get jobs in this country?

This is a very important social reform in our budget that the NDP voted against. It is a reform that is looked upon by experts across this country as the most important initiative that has been taken in Canada to help people get off welfare and social assistance, and get jobs to support their families.

The NDP members come here and rail against corporations. They do not care about the poor people in this country. When we actually bring something to this House, they vote against it.

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CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the American government should be congratulated for going after offshore tax dodgers. However, our own government's feeble attempt pales by comparison. Unfortunately, thousands of law-abiding Canadians are now being unnecessarily harassed by the IRS using laws intended to catch U.S. tax cheats.

Has the government negotiated a true amnesty to protect law-abiding Canadians?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is the sovereign right of the U.S. government to impose tax rules on American citizens. This is a question where it is unfair to some with dual citizenship because they have had no income earned in the United States for a long time, many of whom were unaware of their obligation to file tax returns in the United States, and there are some penalties that can be attached.

We have had discussions with the American treasury authorities. We have heard already from the American ambassador in Canada on the subject and from the treasury in the United States to the effect that they are looking at being more reasonable with respect to the punitive penalties that are possible by the IRS under the legislation. We see some progress there.

[Translation]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have not received any income or had any assets in the United States for years are suddenly being threatened with

enormous fines for not filing their tax returns. Consider the case of a woman who has been living and working in Canada since 1968 who might have to pay \$70,000. Several of the Canadians in question are seniors and their retirement incomes are now in jeopardy.

Will the government negotiate a tax return amnesty for these Canadian citizens?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said a moment ago to the member opposite, it is the right of Canada to impose tax obligations on our citizens. It is the right of the United States to do the same thing. These are people who are American citizens and they choose to maintain their American citizenship. If they do that, they are subject to some rules.

The difficulty is, as the member has mentioned, many of these individuals have not lived in the United States, have not filed in the United States, have not earned any income in the United States, and were unaware of their obligation. It is for those people that we are trying to get some co-operation, leniency quite frankly, with respect to penalties from the American authorities. As I said a moment ago, we are making some progress.

* * *

●(1455)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the prestigious journal *Nature* announced the discovery of an Arctic ozone hole 18 days ago. Journalists sought interviews with the Environment Canada co-author on that paper, Dr. Tarasick. An email from the environment minister's spokesperson told a well-respected science reporter that an interview could not be granted.

Will the government finally let Dr. Tarasick speak freely and ensure that scientists are never muzzled again?

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times in the House, our government is very proud of the scientists at Environment Canada and the work they do.

Our government has taken concrete action over and over again to protect Canada's environment. We have protected record amounts of parkland. We have assessed hundreds of new and existing substances for potential risks to human health through chemical management. We have developed a new air quality management system to reduce the costs of the environment.

We are focused on delivering tangible results, including the area of ozone management.

*Oral Questions***ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY**

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House is well aware of the cuts the government has made to Atlantic Canada: first search and rescue, second Service Canada, third DFO and now ACOA. The shocking news is even worse. ACOA has become a dumping ground for a number of failed Conservative candidates and to make room for this bunch, it is firing hard-working employees at ACOA.

Why the cushy jobs for failed Conservative candidates and pink slips for hard-working maritimers?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would have thought the hon. member would know better. ACOA is not—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The member for Sydney—Victoria has asked a question and the House wants to hear the answer.

The hon. minister of state.

Hon. Bernard Valcourt: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that ACOA has in no way taken part in the hiring of any persons other than ACOA employees. I want to reiterate that the positions that have been eliminated will not affect the level of services to Atlantic Canadians from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency. Do I need—

The Speaker: Unfortunately, the minister is out of time.

The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

* * *

[*Translation*]

G8 SUMMIT**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):**

Mr. Speaker, the President of Treasury Board has quite the sense of humour. Today, he talked about open government. He was very open with the G8 funds—he turned on the taps for the projects of his friends, the mayor of Huntsville and the hotel manager. Unfortunately, as is often the case with the Conservative government, there is a double standard. It was not as open during the Auditor General's investigation.

He is clearly not forthcoming with the public when he refuses to explain himself. But now, with these announcements, will he finally post the documents he kept from us on the Open Government website, www.open.gc.ca?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite speaks about the sense of humour of the President of the Treasury Board. That is rather interesting.

Infrastructure Canada co-operated fully with the auditor general. The auditor general did a thorough review of this issue. She made a number of observations and recommendations, which this government completely accepted, on how we could be even more open and more transparent to the House of Commons.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government has a credibility problem. Asking a Muskoka maverick to sell open government is like asking Homer Simpson to promote nuclear safety. It is now 133 days since he went AWOL from accountability and it is contagious. We now know he runs from the media when he does presentations.

What part of openness includes hiding documents from the auditor general or running a slush fund from a BlackBerry? When will the government get open with the Canadian people and hold this rogue minister accountable?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we approved some 23,000 infrastructure programs in every corner of the country. We gave every province its full per capita share. We worked with NDP, Liberal and Conservative governments from coast to coast to coast. We were able to deliver a lot of new jobs. In doing so, on 32 of those 23,000 projects, the auditor general levelled some serious observations. We fully accepted those observations, and we will do an even better job next time.

* * *

• (1500)

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this summer the world faced the worst humanitarian crisis 60 years. In East Africa, 30 million people are impacted by conflict, drought and famine. The government has been responding to help meet the needs of the victims and refugees.

The Minister of International Co-operation travelled to the region and witnessed the tragic effects of this crisis. Could the minister please update the House on the government's response to this crisis?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is doing its part. Our government's initial \$72 million support has helped provide food to 11.5 million people and nutrition, clean water and medical care to over 2 million people in the region. Matching the generosity of Canadians, I am happy to report an additional \$70.5 million will be put into the famine relief fund to support ongoing aid relief.

Recently, humanitarian workers have been targeted and kidnapped in the region. I call on all parties to allow for safe humanitarian access.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have written to the government requesting that the October 31 deadline for the Canadian Forces appreciation fare on *Marine Atlantic* and the quota system be removed.

Oral Questions

One of my constituents, who recently returned from Afghanistan, inquired about the fare and was told the crossing he wanted to take had its quota of veterans and that he would have to pay. That is some appreciation.

Over 30,000 trips have been taken by veterans since the start of the program. Clearly the need exists. Will the minister commit today to extend the program, eliminate the quota and honour all our veterans who give so much to our country?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question. Veterans and their families are our government's priority. They are the focus of our actions. I invite my colleague to forward her concern to me and we will look at the situation.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, 118 countries are meeting in Brazil to develop an action plan on the social determinants of health. Nevertheless, this government did not feel it was necessary to send representatives. In Canada, 20% of health care expenditures are related to social issues such as homelessness and unemployment.

The World Health Organization recognizes that social inequality leads to health inequities. The costs are astronomical.

Can the Minister of Health explain why she is not participating in this important international meeting?

[*English*]

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we do participate in a number of conferences internationally. Most recently, we were at a conference in New York, at the United Nations, on the declaration around poverty reduction initiatives across countries.

Our government has worked hard to protect and promote the health and safety of all Canadians who make huge investments internationally, as well as in Canada.

* * *

PAN AMERICAN AND PARAPAN AMERICAN GAMES

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the next two weeks, athletes representing 44 countries will compete in the 2011 Pan American Games and later, the Parapan American Games in Guadalajara, Mexico. Among these athletes is our very own Team Canada.

Could the Minister of State for Sport tell us how we are supporting our athletes in Guadalajara and how Canada is preparing to host the games in 2015?

Hon. Bal Gosal (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Brampton West is an Olympian as well.

Last week, I travelled to Guadalajara, Mexico to support our athletes at the 2011 Pan American Games. I am proud to announce that so far Canada has won 33 medals.

The government is proud to support Team Canada through funding to the Canadian Olympic and Paralympic committees and national sports organizations. As a proud supporter of the upcoming 2015 games in Toronto, we have committed funding to sports infrastructure, legacy and essential federal services. We look forward to welcoming these games to Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is Spirit Day. By wearing purple, we show our support for LGBT teens who are the victims of bullying.

The tragic suicide of Jamie Hubley, a 15 year old who took his life in Ottawa last Saturday after being bullied because of his sexual orientation, shows to what extent gay, lesbian, bisexual and transsexual teens are crying out for help. It is high time we demonstrated leadership to protect our young people.

Can the government tell us how it plans to address the bullying and harassment our young people are experiencing?

• (1505)

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know I would speak for all members of the House to offer our sincere condolences to the family of Jamie Hubley. Bullying, homophobia, intolerance and incivility have no place in our schools. It underlies the real challenge of depression and mental health, especially among young people.

Let us resolve, as a society, to promote tolerance and acceptance of each and every one of our fellow citizens.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, blinded by ideology, the Conservatives refuse to believe the statistics, refuse to listen to the Quebec bar and refuse to heed the warnings from places like Texas that have tried this approach and rejected it. Today, Quebec's National Assembly passed a unanimous motion demanding "the withdrawal of the provisions of federal Bill C-10 that go against the interests of Québec and Québec values as regards justice, including those concerning the treatment of young offenders."

Will the minister continue to impose his approach, a major failure, or will he listen to Quebec and its National Assembly?

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know anything about the fight of crime always upsets what is left of the Bloc Québécois.

Oral Questions

The parts of the bill that we have before Parliament have been reviewed by my provincial counterparts over the years, and I am appreciative of their support.

Canadians elected us on this mandate to move forward to get tough on crime. That is why we are here and that is what we will continue to do.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the hon. Kathleen Casey, Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Prince Edward Island.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I believe the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh may wish to pose his inaugural Thursday question.

I see some members standing on points of order. We will do the Thursday question first, and then we will deal with any points of order that may have arisen out of question period.

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping you would go ahead with the point of order so that when I made my points it would be somewhat quieter in the room.

It is my first question as the House leader for the official opposition. I want to thank the leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada for placing her confidence in me to take on this role.

I would also like to note that as the deputy House leader, I had the opportunity to sit in many meetings with the current government House leader and the current House leader of the Liberal Party. From those experiences, I expect that we will work out a co-operative, collegial relationship. We will not always agree, but I believe we will attempt our best to make this Parliament work for all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I would like to ask the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons about his plans for next week. We know that the government has decided to cut off debate on Bill C-18 on Monday and that there will be an NDP opposition day on Tuesday. What other bills does the government intend to have us debate for the rest of the week?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the new official opposition House leader. I had a surprisingly positive and constructive relationship with his predecessor. I say “surprisingly” because some people were skeptical that we would work well together, but indeed we did so in a very genuine way. I am very optimistic that the same will continue with the new official opposition House leader. He has proven himself always to be an individual of very fine comportment so I have great optimism about that.

I would like to thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for his question, and now in response to his question, I would point out that the government's top priority continues to be creating jobs and economic growth.

• (1510)

[*Translation*]

In that regard, I am pleased to say that we have had a productive week so far in the House. On Monday, we passed the Keeping Canada's Economy and Jobs Growing Act and sent it to committee.

[*English*]

This very important bill includes vital measures that Canadians need and expect our government to implement, including a tax credit for small businesses that create jobs, extension of the accelerated capital cost allowance for businesses that invest in manufacturing equipment, and much, much more.

Unfortunately, I was surprised that the opposition voted against these positive economic measures. However, we can hope for better in the future.

[*Translation*]

Then, on Tuesday, we began debate on the Copyright Modernization Act, an important and long-needed bill that will boost Canada's cultural and digital economies.

[*English*]

Unfortunately, members opposite unveiled tactics to delay this bill and the important benefits it would bring to Canada's economy.

In the previous Parliament, that bill had passed second reading after just under seven hours of debate. I hope the opposition will reconsider and allow that to happen this time around.

[*Translation*]

Nevertheless, tomorrow the House resumes debate on Bill C-11. As I already mentioned, hopefully the opposition will see the wisdom in letting the bill get back to a committee for study and clause-by-clause review.

[*English*]

Yesterday, we began debate on the marketing freedom for grain farmers bill. Again, this is a bill that will have real economic benefits for Canada, especially for the economy of western Canada. It is also a bill which offers members a clear-cut choice, either for marketing freedom or for the continuation of the seven decade monopoly. We are looking forward to a good focused debate on this important platform commitment of ours.

Again, however, we are surprised that we are seeing efforts to prevent this bill from moving forward with a motion to adjourn the debate. We heard some bells yesterday.

We will continue debating the bill this afternoon. The third and final day of debate on the bill, following the motion adopted by the House this morning, will be Monday, October 25.

Government Orders

[Translation]

The next allotted day will be Tuesday, October 26. For the business of the House beyond next Tuesday, I will apprise my counterparts at the earliest opportunity.

* * *

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER**ORAL QUESTIONS**

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in response to a question I asked in question period, the minister made note that no defeated Conservative candidates have been hired by ACOA. To that end, could I ask the minister to table a list of persons hired by ACOA and ECBC since the Conservatives came to power?

The Speaker: That is not a point of order. There are ways for members to ask the government to provide information such as through questions on the order paper. I do not believe that is a point of order in this fashion.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in reference to the question asked by the member for Guelph, I just wanted to point out he quoted me as saying yesterday, “we want to provide the same freedom for farmers right across the country.” I did in fact say that, but I followed that by saying:

It is the 21st century, people spend, as I have said, hundreds of thousands of dollars on their own operations. They have to pay their expenses. After growing their own crop, harvesting it, buying the bins and the machinery to do that, they should be able to market that product themselves as well.

Perhaps the Liberals' research department is as poor as it seems to be, but if misquoting members and smearing other members is their new strategy, they should perhaps consider a different one.

The Speaker: I am afraid question period is over. If members have these types of points to make, the proper place to do it is either through questions and answers or during debate on legislation, but not through points of order.

DECORUM IN THE CHAMBER

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am making a point of order I have made before, but it seems particularly poignant today when we are wearing purple and observing Spirit Day on which we are supposed to be assisting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth oppose bullying behaviour.

The point of order I wish to make relates to Standing Order 16, that when a member is speaking, no member shall interrupt him or her, and Standing Order 18, that no member shall use offensive words against other members.

I would just ask members to consider what kind of behaviour we are modelling. I know question period is seen to be a blood sport. I know you, Mr. Speaker, would appreciate more decorum.

From the bottom of my heart, as a mother who does not like to see bullying, I would like us to consider our own behaviour.

• (1515)

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for the intervention. We will move on now.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member has six minutes left to conclude his remarks.

Mr. Earl Dreessen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before question period we were talking about issues that were going to have to take place during transition. The first was on the Canadian Wheat Board's access. The second was on producer cars.

I had just indicated the third where these changes would not change the Canadian Grain Commission's role in assuring the world-renowned quality of Canada's grain. The Canadian Grain Commission will continue to provide its services regardless of who is marketing the grain.

Fourth, on the issue of the future funding of wheat and barley research and market development, a deduction from producers' sales will be established to continue the same level of funding by farmers to these activities. These funds will support the great work that is being done by the Western Grains Research Foundation, the Canadian International Grains Institute and the Canadian Malting Barley Technical Centre.

The deduction will be mandated by government for the transition period. In the meantime, we are discussing with industry a long-term mechanism to support research and market development in order to keep our great industry moving forward.

As Keith Degenhardt, chairman of the Western Grains Research Foundation, wrote to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, “The Canadian Wheat Board method of collecting the check-off is certainly not the only method of collecting wheat and barley check-offs”.

Many have expressed concerns about the future of the port of Churchill which depends upon Canadian Wheat Board shipments for the majority of its business. Our government knows how important the port of Churchill is to the strength and growth of our northern economy. The port is part of the government's overall northern strategy, setting out a vibrant vision for the north and it will remain the Prairies' Arctic gateway to the world.

Government Orders

Over the past four years, we have invested close to \$40 million, \$37.4 million to be exact, to improve the port's facilities, including rail and air access. We are backing up that commitment with a concrete plan to support a strong future for the port following the introduction of marketing freedom for western grain and barley growers.

As the first phase, we are investing federal funds to provide timely support for Churchill. For the second phase, once we know better the impact of marketing freedom on the port, we will decide what new initiatives will be needed to drive a bright future for the port. We will continue to work with all stakeholders to explore new opportunities for this vital northern asset.

We are also very encouraged by the willingness and positive outlook of owners OmniTRAX, the largest privately held rail service in North America, to sit down with us to develop a business plan and chart a way forward for Canada's only major northern seaport.

As for grain industry jobs, while we will see some job losses at the Canadian Wheat Board initially, we expect private grain marketers and processors to expand and start up new businesses in Canada. In fact, Milton Boyd, a professor and economist at the University of Manitoba, believes, "Just as creation of the Board in the 1930s shifted some jobs away from the private grain firms, removal of the board's monopoly in 2012 would shift some jobs back to the private grain firms."

Milling firms will be able to purchase directly from the farmer of their choice at whatever price they negotiate. Entrepreneurs will have the option of starting up their own small specialty flour mills, malting and pasta plants.

As Brian Otto, president of the Western Barley Growers Association, said, "Canadian millers will have the opportunity to develop niche contracting programs to satisfy needs for specific traits". He also believes, "Minor classes of wheat will find new, robust markets that were ignored under the single desk because they were too small".

The future of our agriculture industry is bright. We have seen tremendous growth in value-added opportunities for oats, pulses and canola across the Prairies over the past 20 years. We will see these same opportunities open up for wheat and barley as we implement marketing freedom, just as we saw in Saskatchewan a few weeks ago.

We will work with farmers and industry to attract investment, encourage innovation, create value-added jobs and build a stronger economy. By taking this historic and decisive action to ensure certainty and clarity for producers who will soon be entering into forward contracts for their 2012 crop, this will create opportunities in the grain market and respect western wheat and barley farmers' property rights, rights upon which our nation was built.

I urge opposition members of the House to support the bill. Its timely passage will give farmers the certainty they need to plan their business decisions for the coming year. We will free farmers to feed families around the world with the safe, high quality wheat and barley they are so proud of.

•(1520)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Red Deer is aware of a recent article in *The Wall Street Journal* that lauded the Wheat Board's demise because of the increased profits for grain companies, yet an article in *The Economist* warns of the tragedy that would prevail in western provinces with the closure of small farms and the negative impact that it would have on small farming communities.

Why is the member prepared to sacrifice the well-being of so many for the well-being and profits of so few?

Mr. Earl Dreessen: Mr. Speaker, I am thankful that the member for Guelph has asked me that question, because he is talking to a farmer from western Canada who has a family farm that has been there since 1903.

There were types of things we were forced to do when we were told that we would not be able to market the wheat and barley that we produced. It pushed us into producing flax and canola in order to get some cash flow. When farmers produce their crop and then find out they are not going to get paid for it for 18 months and then are subject to all of the different things that are happening because of the Canadian Wheat Board, these are the kinds of changes that we believe are going to increase the family farm. This is the reason we will be able to ask our sons and daughters to come back and create the family farm that we all have dreamed of.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to follow up on the comment the member just made, because he is educating the folks across the way.

We farm as well. Two years ago, we had durum in our bin. The Wheat Board said it would contract 60% of it. The person who was farming our land had found a market for the other 40% in the United States. When he went to the Wheat Board and said he would like to do a buy-back, meaning we would have to buy our own grain back to sell it, the Wheat Board told him "absolutely not". When he asked why, the Wheat Board said it was not contracting the other 40%, so he could not sell it. When he asked what he was supposed to do, he was told to leave that 40% of the crop in the bin until next year and the Wheat Board would see if it would deal with it then.

Has the member had that type of experience in dealing with the Canadian Wheat Board when trying to market his grain? The question directly relates to having to grow canola and flax and those kinds of crops in order to have cash flow on a farm. I would be interested in hearing if the member has any of those stories or experiences as well.

Mr. Earl Dreessen: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that question as well as for all the work he has done to help give marketing freedom for farmers.

I can think back to the different operations involved on our farm. I started farming 40 years ago, so I have been filling out a Canadian Wheat Board permit for the last 40 years and I know the types of things that have happened and the concerns we have in central Alberta.

Government Orders

First, farmers are not able to get delivery contracts when they require them. Second, when the Canadian Wheat Board decides it wants to move some of our grain, a lot of the time we find that it happens to be when the road bans are on. If that does not work, then it says we had better have it delivered while we are trying to put our crops in. Finally, sometime in the summer we are able to get that pushed in there because we have to ensure it is done before July 31. Those are just part of the concerns that one has.

Then when we take a look at the dollars being returned to the Canadian farmer compared to the dollars we find elsewhere, we can see it is one of the reasons that the family farm has the problems it has now.

These are some of the things we have to consider.

• (1525)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in this debate. It is obviously a debate that provokes a great deal of emotion, and I suppose that is understandable.

The grain industry in western Canada has always been a source of considerable controversy. That is because it is a multi-billion dollar industry. It has huge importance to the livelihoods and way of life of many prairie families.

Its structure is also significant, with tens of thousands of individual farmers on one side, most of them in family farm operations, and then a few large corporations on the other side, namely the railways and grain companies—many of them foreign-controlled—that run the grain handling and transportation system.

It is an inherently uneven playing field, and farmers, sadly, are positioned to get the short end of the stick. Down through the years, various attempts have been made by producers, communities, farm organizations, governments and others to correct or at least to try to offset that imbalance. The strongest effort, and certainly the most successful, has come through the Canadian Wheat Board.

After a number of dubious experiences with previous open markets and many failed experiments with voluntary pooling over the years, the Wheat Board was first created—by a Conservative government, incidentally—in 1935. It was given many of its essential single desk characteristics by a Liberal government in 1943.

It is interesting to note that for several decades after 1943, the board's existence was actually considered to be temporary, and it had to have its powers renewed by Parliament by a vote in this House every few years.

They were, of course, renewed year after year, decade after decade, because those powers exercised by the Canadian Wheat Board had proven to be effective. Farmers over those years effectively wanted and supported the board. Successive federal governments, both Liberal and Conservative, acted on the farmers' opinion that the Canadian Wheat Board's mandate should be renewed.

The last major revision of the Wheat Board's structure came in 1997. As the minister at that time, I knew our government had four

primary objectives in the legislation that it introduced in 1997. That legislation came into effect on January 1, 1998.

The first objective was to make the Canadian Wheat Board a truly producer-controlled operation. It is, as a result of that legislation, no longer a crown corporation. It is not a government entity run by five hand-picked servants of the government beholden only to the government. Instead it is a modern marketing organization controlled and operated by farmers themselves. That was the first objective of that legislation 13 years ago.

Second, we needed to make that producer control legitimate and accountable by making the Canadian Wheat Board fully democratic. Farmers themselves now elect the overwhelming majority of the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board, which is an innovation that has existed in the law only since 1998. Farmers elect 10 of the 15 directors on the Canadian Wheat Board. Obviously, if the farmers do not like what those directors do, they can be voted out of office. The elections occur every two years on a rotating basis.

It is interesting to note that down through the years since 1998, 80% of the farmers elected, re-elected and then re-elected, in some cases, by their peers to serve on the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors have been strong supporters of the single desk system. That is like a referendum that happens every two years, and the single desk side in that vote wins 80% of the time.

That was the second objective: to make the Canadian Wheat Board not only producer-controlled, but democratic in its operations.

• (1530)

Third, these directors were given the scope, the mandate and the power to innovate, to change, to be flexible, to provide prairie producers with an unprecedented range of options and alternatives in how grain is marketed and how farmers are paid for their grain, and the board has delivered on that mandate over the last number of years by introducing a number of groundbreaking innovations in the board's operations.

As this debate has raged over the last number of weeks and months, I have heard a number of farmers make the point that in many ways the criticisms we hear these days about the board's operations are really about the old board, the way it used to exist before 1998, before democratic producer control took over. That old board was gone more than a decade ago. Since then, there has obviously been a dramatic improvement.

Principle number one was producer control. Principle number two was democratic operations. Principle number three was flexibility, innovation and accountability. Principle number four was this: for the future, we built into the law a clear provision to put the ultimate fate of the Canadian Wheat Board in the hands of farmers themselves.

Government Orders

Section 47.1 of the existing act does not prohibit changes to the single desk. It does not prohibit even the elimination of the single desk. However, it makes it clear that the decision is one for farmers to take. It is not for politicians or bureaucrats, but for farmers themselves. Section 47.1 embeds in the law the principle that there ought to be a plebiscite, a vote, held among prairie farmers to determine whether or not the nature of the single desk ought to be changed.

Before legislation like Bill C-18 can be legally introduced in this House, the government is obliged to consult with the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, and it is obliged to hold a vote among farmers on the specific changes it is proposing to make.

No such vote has been held by the government prior to introducing Bill C-18.

The minister says he is not obliged to have a vote because he is not making any kind of technical change to the single desk. He is not making small modifications to the way the single desk operates. He says that if he were making changes of that kind, then in fact he would be obliged to come to farmers through a vote or a plebiscite to get the farmers' opinions on what he is proposing to do.

The minister says that he is not obliged to do that in this case because he is not making smaller technical changes to the single desk: he is simply abolishing it altogether.

Let us think about that logic. It is like the doctor saying, as the patient being wheeled into surgery, "Well, if I am just going to take out your tonsils, I will do you the courtesy of asking for your opinions, but if what I have in mind is euthanasia, killing you altogether, I will not bother to ask for your advice".

Obviously the government's position is ludicrous on that point. The legislation has the effect of destroying the single desk, and accordingly section 47.1 obliges the government to get the opinion of farmers before they take that step. The government has not done so, and therefore, in our opinion, this legislation is not proceeding properly at this time.

Liberals in Parliament will not support this legislation, Bill C-18, to kill the single desk marketing system for the Canadian Wheat Board for at least four strong reasons.

The first one has to do with process. The CWB is now democratically controlled and operated by western Canadian grain producers. Today's legislation eliminates that democratic producer control, and it replaces it with direct and complete government control. The elected producer directors will be gone, and instead the board will be run only by five people appointed by the government.

The Conservatives are also disenfranchising farmers by ignoring their legal obligation as it exists today to hold a producer plebiscite before introducing any legislation that has the effect of destroying the single desk. That is our first reason for opposing this legislation: the attack on democracy, the attack on proper process, the ignoring of the right of farmers to vote.

• (1535)

Our second reason is one of cost. By killing the single desk operation, the government is effectively reducing the value of

Canadian wheat and barley in global markets by as much as \$400 million to \$600 million per year. That is the typical price premium that the Canadian Wheat Board is able to gain every year for western farmers and bring into the Canadian economy because of its ability to price discriminate.

The ability to price discriminate depends exclusively upon the existence of the single desk operation. If we have a single desk operation, we can go to each individual grain market in the world and extract the highest price available in that market. Obviously, the higher priced markets in Europe such as the high scale department stores and food stores in London, England, will pay a higher price than will Yap Milling in Indonesia. They are two entirely different markets. If we have a single desk operation, we can distinguish between those markets. We can get the top price in London and the top price in Indonesia and they are not the same price.

If there is leakage everywhere because there is no single desk operation, we will then be competing for the bottom price. It would be a race for the bottom price. We will end up with the lowest price rather than the top price available in each individual market.

Without the single desk operation we will lose the ability to price discriminate. According to many experts in the industry, the cost of that will be roughly \$400 billion to \$600 billion a year depending on the marketing year. Without the single desk operation, the ability and the clout to price discriminate will be gone.

The third reason is that the government's new legislation will also reduce farmers' clout here at home.

There will be a lot of collateral damage with the loss of the Wheat Board. For example, the producers' right to load their own rail cars as a safety valve against commercial exploitation will technically remain in the wording of the Canada Grain Act. However, without the Canadian Wheat Board to give producer car shipments logistical priority that right will be largely meaningless.

I note that the report the government commissioned on so-called marketing freedom which was published a few weeks ago clearly makes the point that the right to access producer cars, not actually the effective functioning of producer cars but just the access to producer cars, will continue in the Canada Grain Act. However, that report specifically states they would not be given any priority in the system. Therefore, we can order our producer car and we might get it three years from now if there happens to be nothing else happening at the time. It is a right without any meaningful application unless we have someone who is managing the logistics of the system and will give the producer car some priority.

Government Orders

Similarly, producer-owned grain terminals and short-line rail operations will be at the mercy of large grain companies and the railways. The grain companies and the railways have always opposed the existence of the producer-owned grain terminals and short-line rail operations because it means that grain goes around their system, it provides competition and they do not get the tariffs and the fees. Obviously, they are not going to be conducive to allowing those innovations to continue to be used in the system.

What is most important in terms of collateral damage is there will be no player in the western grain handling and transportation system with the clout and the will to stand up for farmers and to take on entities like the railways when their services fail, which happens about 50% of the time according to the government's own rail service review, or when the railways attempt to extract excessive freight rates.

That is the third reason why we cannot support the legislation.

• (1540)

Finally, the Conservative government is about to hand to the United States a huge trade freebie.

The elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board has been the Americans' number one trade objective in North America for the past 20 to 25 years. Courtesy of the Conservative government, the U.S. is about to receive its fondest wish and Canada will get absolutely nothing in return.

The Canadian Wheat Board's single desk system as well as its clout and ability to outdo the American grain marketing system will be gone but Canada will have no better access to the U.S. market. Country of origin labelling discrimination against Canada will continue. The buy America trade discrimination against Canada will continue. The new U.S. marine tax discrimination against Canada will go on. Border thickening will continue. U.S. discrimination against Canadians working in the defence industry will continue. The U.S. attack on Canadian softwood lumber will continue. U.S. authorities will continue to close the border to Canadian wheat and other products whenever it suits them. Thus, Canada has gained absolutely nothing from its unilateral disarmament in the grain trade.

I reiterate that there will be a failure to apply due process and recognize the producer democratic control of the Canadian Wheat Board. There will be an imposition of new costs on farmers and a loss of value to the tune of \$400 million to \$600 million a year in terms of price premiums left on the table and not captured for western Canadian producers. As well, there will be a loss of clout in terms of dealing with other aspects of the grain handling and transportation system, especially regarding the ability to take on the railways when necessary.

I would note on that last point, that on at least two occasions in the last few years the Canadian Wheat Board has taken the railways to the Canadian Transportation Agency. As a result of those proceedings, it won the farmers something in the order of \$200 million in excess freight charges. That was money that was taken out of farmers' pockets. The Wheat Board put that money back into farmers' pockets. The bill will remove that authority, that ability and that clout.

This is a unilateral disarmament of the Canadian farmer. The Americans are giving up absolutely nothing and will not even guarantee absolute access to the U.S. grain market. However, the Canadian Wheat Board, a pillar of the system in Canada, will be gone.

For all of those reasons we oppose the bill.

We propose an amendment to the motion that is presently before the House.

I move:

That the amendment be amended by adding after the words "70 years" the following:

"*, including specifically the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board's role in managing transportation logistics and thereby leaving farmers without an effective voice with respect to rail service levels and freight rates; and (d) breaches section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act*".

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The subamendment to the motion is receivable.

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague intently. In response to the kind of issues he put forward with regard to the Wheat Board I would use a term that he has used many times in the House, "total horse feathers".

As a farmer I understand full well exactly what he is talking about. I was the minister in charge of railways and I am aware of the issues regarding rail and the rail service review. It has been announced that legislation is coming with regard to the protection of railways. However, that is not the gist of my question.

My hon. colleague said that the Wheat Board is actually capitalizing on a better price for wheat for farmers in western Canada. If there was a shred of evidence of that being true, then farmers in Saskatchewan and Alberta would not be loading their grain cars and trying to run the border to get across to the other side to get a better price for their product, especially when they will be thrown in jail by that government for that act. The opposite would be happening. Americans would be loading their grain cars trying to rush the northern border to capitalize on a better rate through the Wheat Board. That is just the logic of it.

The real question is how much it is costing farmers in western Canada at the farm gate to support and subsidize the Wheat Board because that is what is happening.

• (1545)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman and I will simply have to agree to disagree on that point. I support my side of the argument. A number of studies done by both the Wheat Board and independent organizations have analyzed this issue of the price premium that is available in the world. For some marketing years price premiums are hard to get, but when they are available they are captured uniquely by the Canadian Wheat Board system. On average, the calculation in terms of the value of price discrimination in the marketplace over the years is in the range of \$500 million. That money was brought into western Canada and distributed among western Canadian farmers. It would not have been there if the single desk system did not exist.

Government Orders

On the other side of the equation in terms of cost, the total administrative costs of the Canadian Wheat Board, including everything from the cost of sending salespeople on missions around the world to paying for the pens, paper, pencils and the office in Winnipeg, works out to about 7¢ to 9¢ per bushel. That arithmetic has been verified by the Auditor General of Canada. Compared to the administrative expenses incurred in organizations like Cargill, Bunge and other international grain companies, that is an extremely favourable cost. As well, the administrative expense of running the grain system will undoubtedly go up without the Canadian Wheat Board in that system.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, would the member reflect on what the prairie farmers have to say? Time after time Conservative members of Parliament have said the farmers want to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. However, 62% of prairie grain farmers actually want to keep it. That is the vast majority in my books. Could the member comment on that?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, it is an important point. Granted an exact assessment of producer opinion at any given moment in time is a difficult thing to accomplish whatever side of the debate one happens to be on.

The fact that the government is reluctant to hold a plebiscite is a very telling point. If a plebiscite were properly held, with a clear question, an independent administration and scrutinized by independent farm organizations so that it would be completely above reproach in every way, shape or form, making it a valid reflection of producer opinion, I suspect the results would be similar to the results of the one conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board this past summer. Those results indicated that in the case of wheat something like 62% of prairie producers said they would prefer the single desk operation and in the case of barley it was 51%. Both of those results indicate a majority of producers are in favour of the single desk system.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know some members will wonder why someone from Vancouver would rise to speak on the Canadian Wheat Board. However, there is one wheat farmer in my constituency, in Metchosin. She is Sharon Rempel of the Vancouver Island heritage wheat project.

An hon. member: Is that outside the Wheat Board area?

Mr. Randall Garrison: It is outside the Wheat Board area, but I actually know someone who is growing wheat.

Her concern is with regard to the decline of heritage wheat varieties that will take place in an open market. She is also concerned with the continuing decline of family farms. In 1931, about a third of Canadians lived on family farms. That number is now down to 1 in 50.

I ask the hon. member what effect does he think the elimination of the Wheat Board would have in terms of the heritage varieties of wheat from the Vancouver Island perspective and also from the family farm perspective?

• (1550)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, the quality control system that Canada has developed through 100 years of experience is highly

respected and admired around the world. It has a number of players. The most fundamental player is the Canadian farmer who is a superb producer on par and I would argue above par in comparison to any other grain-producing group found anywhere on the face of the earth. Canadian farmers are absolutely excellent at what they do. However, they are assisted in that process by the Canadian Grain Commission, the Canadian International Grains Institute as well as a number of other agencies that research and work on new plant varieties and in some cases attempt to resurrect historic varieties such as the one the hon. gentleman referred to.

It is an integrated system. All of the pieces fit together. The Canadian Wheat Board has been an integral piece in that puzzle. Therefore, if we remove the board we will in fact put a number of the other pieces in jeopardy, which by implication the government's announcement actually admits.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, actually, I have to thank the member opposite. One of the main reasons I am involved in politics, one of the reasons I am here, is because of him. His rule as the agriculture minister and as the minister in charge of the Canadian Wheat Board convinced me I needed to get off my farm and needed to do something more to protect my own farm interests and the interests of my neighbours.

I guess the Crow rate would have to be his biggest legacy, which was of course the promise from the government that it would pay farmers a subsidization in return for the Crow rate being removed. His government completely removed that subsidy from farmers and basically devastated Western Canada. When the Liberals did that, he was the minister in charge.

The second legacy he leaves behind is the CWB and his treatment of farmers. He has just talked about western Canadian farmers being superb producers, but that they cannot be trusted to market their own grain. It was a decade ago that 13 farmers went to jail because the member and his government refused to give them any freedom to market or export their grain.

My question to him today is, does he ever wake up at night and regret having locked western Canadian farmers in jail just because they wanted to market their grain, and has he realized since then how important marketing freedom is to western Canadian farmers?

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, no one likes legal proceedings of the kind that the hon. gentleman has referred to, but in fact, when there is the risk of smuggling, of border running, and other behaviour on the part of a very tiny minority that is risking the reality of the U.S. market being shut down, closed off, the border closed, for 50,000 other farmers across the west, it is a serious matter that has to be treated seriously. The appropriate action was taken at the time

Government Orders

What has also happened in the intervening 10 years is the democratization of the Canadian Wheat Board, the introduction of producer control, more flexibility and innovation in the operation of the board than ever before, and the right of farmers themselves to determine their marketing future. Through that whole period of time, every public analysis that has been undertaken has indicated that when the choice is offered to farmers in clear term, the result coming back in relation to wheat is two to one in favour of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Hon. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to split my time with the hon. member for Medicine Hat.

This is an important issue that is near and dear to my heart, and the comments I am going to make this afternoon are biased, I admit. I am going to fess up right off the bat that I am a farmer. My son is actually the fourth generation on our farm so agriculture goes back a long way in our family. I have produced wheat and barley every year for the last 30 to 40 years, and my comments are biased because I will do and say anything I possibly can to support the farm family and agriculture in western Canada.

When my son wanted to take over the family farm, I tried to discourage him because I knew how difficult agriculture is. It is a very demanding occupation. So I told him to go and get a business education and I would teach him how to farm. So he got a business education and now he is teaching me how to farm. It is amazing what our young entrepreneurs in agriculture are doing and can accomplish. It is phenomenal to see how the industry has developed and is unbelievably engaging.

It is interesting to look at the trumped-up survey from this summer that the opposition members refer to so often. Believe me, farmers have been voting loud and clear and not just because of the 52 out of 56 seats that were won in the May election. They were voting with their seed drills and they have been doing it for a decade or more every spring when they grow products such as canola that are outside the Wheat Board.

Canola has outstripped wheat as the number one commodity in Canada and that is not an accident but it is because the farmers are getting the world price for their canola. They are not getting the world price for their wheat. Because of canola being outside the Wheat Board, farmers have the flexibility to manage and market and get those dollars into their pocket to handle the farm income in a way that enables them to handle the risks of their business. This is important.

The other thing about the survey and why I say it is trumped up is I have been farming for 40-plus years, all my life, growing barley or wheat every year and I never got a survey. I never had a chance to vote in this trumped-up survey. If farmers are missed like me in this survey and then those numbers are used to wail about what farmers really think, then the opposition has to soberly consider what it is doing and who it is representing.

It is not by accident that in the May election only four out of the fifty six seats in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, provinces controlled by the Wheat Board, did not go to the Conservative government. Where were those four seats? Two of them were in downtown Winnipeg, one in downtown Regina and one in

downtown Edmonton. I have not seen a combine or a kernel of wheat or barley in any one of those ridings ever.

So when members look at this piece of legislation, they should put aside ideology and do the right thing for agriculture and for farmers. Let us just for a second assume that the monopoly of the Wheat Board, if it is dual-marketed, is going to compromise the value at the farm gate. Then they would never have to worry about it because every farmer is astute enough to market their grain where they will get the best value for it. If that is the Wheat Board, that is where they will go. If that happens, nothing will change.

However, all this bill would do is allow farmers the opportunity to market their grain where they feel they can get better value for that dollar. If they can get a better value for the bushel of wheat or barley in an independent way by another avenue, then the question has to be asked how that can possibly be when the Wheat Board has a monopoly and has the inside track on getting the best value for farmers.

As I said a few minutes ago, if it were true that farmers were getting the best value for their wheat and barley, American farmers would be bringing their wheat here to capitalize on that marketing opportunity. That is not the case. The opposite is the case and there is a reason for it and it is that farmers are astute enough to understand their business plan and understand what is in their best interests as they move forward.

• (1555)

It is very important to say that this has to happen in conjunction with what was announced by our government on rail freight and transportation. The success of our country is really going to depend upon how well we can access international markets, how well and how fast we can get our canolas, wheats and barleys, our products and commodities to markets overseas. That is really where the growth lies.

As a government we put \$3.6 billion-plus into the Asia-Pacific gateway so that we can streamline that transportation system. We have seen in our government a change in the way that railways have actually treated agriculture. Their on-car deliveries this last year was up to over 90% compared to the year before, where it was down to about 50%.

Why is that changing? It is because of the rail freight service review. We have actually forced the railways to have a service agreement with those industries and farmers who have producer cars and so on, and who are shipping their products.

It has to go hand in glove because the railways win when shippers win, and when shippers and railways both win then Canada wins. It is very important that we make certain to streamline that system, so that the system will be able to handle the kinds of demands and opportunities that are there.

Government Orders

It is interesting, when we look at agriculture, just how big it is. It has changed so much. Since the 1950s it has gone up 300%, the productivity level in agriculture. That is what we are actually doing on the farm.

Seventy six per cent of those young farmers, in this survey that is being referred to, said that they wanted to break the monopoly. They wanted to have the opportunity to capitalize on markets other than the monopoly of the Wheat Board. Even using this survey, when we start looking into the future of where we are going to go, that is really the question, where do we go from here? What is it going to look like after we have dual marketing?

We have lost productivity or opportunity for our world share in wheat. It has fallen 42% in the last 50 years. We have lost 42% in the ability to capture those markets. When it comes to barley, the numbers are even worse. It is two-thirds, 66% since the 1980s that we have lost in the ability to capitalize on those international markets.

Where does the future lie? The population of the world right now is about 6.9 billion, 7 billion. What is it going to be in 2020? It is expected to be 7.6 billion. That is 68 million more people to feed, every year in this world. Where is agriculture going to be? It is not the same today as it was in the 1930s, when the Wheat Board was first brought in by a Conservative government, and it was voluntary, not forced, not a monopoly.

We are saying we should break the monopoly and allow the opportunity to see if the Wheat Board actually can do the job for the farmers or not.

We are saying that we have grown in opportunity for agricultural exports, but not because of the Wheat Board. It is in spite of the Wheat Board. It was \$39 billion that was traded in 2010. We are in the top five agricultural exporters in the world. That is something to be proud of. It is because of the quality of the product that it is in such demand around the world.

The price is not realized. We are not getting world prices for wheat. We are here to protect our farmers. We have to actually ensure we have the farmers' interests in mind as we stand and speak on this piece of legislation. This is a very important piece of legislation that we are committed to for our electorate.

Speaking of that, I get this all the time. The opposition is saying that farmers think this and farmers think that. Well, I happen to be one of those farmers. So I have to ask, is it just me or do I represent my riding? I have yet to have a piece of mail or a phone call from anyone in my riding, although I am sure there are some people out there, that supports the monopoly.

I have yet to have one of those people call my office and say, "Can you phone me back and explain why you are doing what you are doing?" All of them are saying, "We want freedom. We want choice".

That is where we need to go with this piece of legislation. It is an unbelievable opportunity that we have before us for agriculture in this country, for the family farm in this country, but more than that as we grow this country and capitalize on those international markets that are ripe for the taking.

We look forward to this bill passing. We encourage everyone in this House to consider their support as we come down to the vote on this.

• (1600)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member told us that he used to be a farmer and never had a chance to respond to the Canadian Wheat Board survey he referred to. Like his Conservative colleagues, he seems very sure that all farmers in the west are against this board.

Since he is so sure, I would like to know—and I would like him to answer yes or no—whether he would be prepared to hold a referendum to ask farmers, so that they can have the choice and not have this imposed on them by the government. Would he be prepared to hold a referendum, yes or no?

• (1605)

[*English*]

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, I would love to answer that one.

We have had a number. We had one in May, which was an election for 56 potential seats. There was a platform before them to breaking the monopoly and 52 of the 56 voted expected the government to follow through on the obligation in that platform. From one perspective, that is a very strong mandate to ensure that we do the right thing for agriculture and for the prairie farmer.

More than that, just look at what the farmers themselves have been doing. Every spring they go out and decide what to grow, whether it be wheat, canola, lentils or peas. That is what those who are outside the board are growing. Why are they growing this? Because the opportunities to capitalize on world prices is there. If they were getting the best price in the world, they would be growing more wheat and barley, but they are not.

It is unfortunate that we do not have the same opportunity in the prairies that they do in the rest of the country. All we are saying is that there should be an opportunity for a fair and open system. We look forward to that opportunity for western farmers, the same as Ontario farmers and east of Ontario.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative member after Conservative member have stood and said that they are grain farmers and that this is a good thing that will happen. Yet we know full well that a legitimate plebiscite was conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board. Members laugh, but I would love to see the government have the political courage to conduct its own plebiscite.

The reality is a credible plebiscite was done. The vast majority of those grain farmers, unlike the Conservative farmers here it appears, said that they wanted to retain the Wheat Board.

If the Conservative members who represent the prairies are so convinced that their arguments are so sound, why do they not then take the challenge in the form of a plebiscite, argue it among the grain farmers and ensure that there is, according the government, a legitimate plebiscite on the issue?

Government Orders

If the government is not prepared to do that, at the very least respect that independent plebiscite that was conducted through the Canadian Wheat Board.

Hon. Rob Merrifield: Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is respect the farmer in western Canada. When it comes to that independent survey, as a farmer for 40 years who did not even get an opportunity to vote or take part in it, that tells us a bit about the credibility of that survey.

Nonetheless, it is absolutely critical that we move forward on this. Farmers are speaking loud and clear with their seed drills and voting patterns to make certain that happens.

To answer the member's question in a more direct way, right now it is absolutely imperative that we get this legislation through as fast as we can to have certainty for farmers so they can determine what kind of chemicals and fertilizers to use this fall based on the kind of products they will grow come spring seeding.

This is all about planning and being an entrepreneur on the farm. There is no way the House should hold that up for anything more than what we already know is in the best interests of farmers. We look forward to the legislation passing very soon.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Vancouver Quadra, Health; the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, National Defence.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Medicine Hat.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very privileged to stand in the House and talk about the marketing freedom for grain farmers act for western Canadians. I would also like to thank my colleague, the member for Yellowhead, for sharing his time with me today.

Marketing freedom is very good news for farmers in Alberta and for our economy. The wheat and barley business in Alberta is a major driver of our economy, bringing \$1.3 billion to the farm gate. We are confident we can grow that business even more under marketing choice.

The government is committed to bringing marketing freedom to western Canadian wheat and barley farmers. Under the strong leadership of our Prime Minister, our government continues to fight for farmers' freedom. Giving farmers the freedom to choose to whom they sell their products is the right thing to do.

Farmers in the west have been waiting for a long time for this change. In fact, one farmer in my riding believed so strongly that he should be able to market his own grain that he tried to do that. What was his reward? This western Canadian farmer was put in jail for trying to sell his own grain, the grain that he grew on his own land and harvested himself with his own machinery. That was a travesty. Our Minister of Agriculture and our Prime Minister have said that they will not let that happen again. That is one more reason we are bringing marketing freedom to western Canadian farmers.

As the hon. Minister of Agriculture has said, entrepreneurs, including farmers, need as many options as possible to market and

sell their goods. This has never been more true than in today's uncertain economy.

In Alberta there are currently several grain processors in the malting and milling sector. Business savvy farmers deserve the ability to add value to their crops and capture more profits from the farm gate by delivering the specific quality for which a processor is looking. They deserve to make their own business decisions and have the opportunity to seek out the best possible return for their wheat and barley, just as they would with canola, or pulse crops, or cattle, or any number of other farm products from across the country.

Henry Vos, an elected director of the Canadian Wheat Board, agrees that farmers are business savvy. He said, "Similarly to how they can market their canola, peas and forage seed. Some farmers want to market it to the company that will pay the most for it".

Farmers are the ones who take all the risks and make all the investments, and the government is committed to providing them with the marketing freedom they want and deserve.

I would like to take a minute to explain some of the history of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The monopoly was first imposed on western Canadian farmers on October 12, 1943. That was during World War II, when Canada was committed to supplying wheat to Great Britain. The monopoly came in by order-in-council. Producers were not consulted. It was done with the intention of aiding the war effort, not with any pretence that it would get the best returns for farmers.

Even Lorne Gunter, a columnist with the *National Post*, recognizes this. He says:

This is a free country. If farmers do not want to use the board to market the grain they grow on their own land, using seed, fertilizers and pesticides they paid for themselves, with equipment that belongs to them, then they shouldn't have to, no matter what their neighbours want.

Today, western Canadian farmers deserve the right to choose how to market their wheat and barley, just as they do with their other crops, such as canola, pulses and oats. The world has moved away from the state trading commodity procurement approach, which some countries used in the past, and has adopted an open market, a freer enterprise system in which multiple buyers select a range of quality attributes for particular market segments. Buyers want high quality products, which Canadians produce, but they want them delivered at a certain time, in a certain way, in a manner that often farmers are best able to meet.

• (1610)

Farmers are looking for new value-added revenue streams and greater marketing flexibility. We are listening to farmers and want to help them succeed.

Government Orders

Currently, by law, western Canadian wheat, durum and barley growers do not have the same rights as the producers in the rest of the country as to where they are to sell their products and they do not have the rights they enjoy with other crops. The best people to decide the production and marketing options for their farms are the farmers, as they take the risks and live with the consequences.

That is what marketing choice will deliver. We will not rest until that is achieved. We live in a free and democratic country. Farmers want marketing choice and our government is committed to delivering what prairie farmers want. We will not stand idle, while western Canadian farmers are shortchanged by an out-of-date act of Parliament. We have made our intentions clear and we encourage the Canadian Wheat Board to work in the best interests of western grain farmers to remain a viable marketing option for those farmers who want to continue to use it.

At the end of the day, it is all about the farmers. It is about an open-market system. Greg Porozni, chairman of the Alberta Grains Council, has said that a deregulated grain market will be a boon for a savvy farmer.

The government wants to ensure that western Canadian wheat and barley farmers have the same rights and privileges as other Canadian farmers. It is all about fairness. It is all about looking to the future, not continuing to rely upon an outdated system that was developed nearly seven decades ago. I invite my hon. colleagues to join this government in supporting freedom for wheat and barley farmers.

We look forward to continuing to work with the men and women responsible for growing Canada's grain to ensure that, above all else, they have the greatest say in making decisions that affect their own livelihood.

I hope all members of the House will stand to support the bill and give it the speedy passage it deserves in order to give farmers the business certainty they need.

•(1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is with respect to a story that was printed in publication the member would be familiar with called *The Economist*. It is published by a fairly well-respected world news organization. I would like to quote directly from it, as I did earlier today in question period. It states:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies. Eventually, this should lead to consolidation and fewer, bigger farms—making Canada a more competitive wheat producer, but devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

There is a valid argument to be made that the government, by killing the Wheat Board, is going to be destroying family farms, that it is going to be making it that much more difficult for some of those rural communities to survive.

Would the member not agree that there is some merit to what has been printed in this story, as story published by a news organization that is known throughout the world and is fairly well-respected?

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague talks about *The Economist* being a credible organization and magazine. In terms

of being credible, he is probably when it called his former prime minister “Mr. Dithers”.

Canadian farmers and people on the Prairies are resilient. Communities are resilient. They in fact are determined that freedom for their wheat and barley will produce much greater benefits for themselves and the communities in which they live.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I could not help but take the opportunity to stand in my place because it is the younger people I represent in my constituency, the young people who are trying to build a better future for their families on the farm, who very desperately want the option to market their grain so that they can get the best value for their wheat and barley.

What they currently find disturbing is that past governments have treated them so paternalistically. Past governments have said farmers in some parts of Canada might be smart enough to market their own grain, but not the farmers in western Canada. They could not possibly understand how to do something like that.

Young farmers have been even more disturbed these last number of months over plans unveiled at the Canadian Wheat Board just after an election of directors, when no discussions of the purchase of \$65 million of shipping equipment took place. That issue could have been discussed and debated, but it was not. It was never discussed. Young farmers were never given an opportunity to provide their input on the purchase. This paternalistic organization determined that it would use those young farmers' money to buy \$65 million worth of ships, which many farmers are convinced would never carry a bit of western Canadian grain.

I wonder if the hon. member for Medicine Hat would comment with regard to the concern that many young farmers have in my constituency with regard to the paternalistic attitude of past governments, as well as the organization itself.

•(1620)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Mr. Speaker, that was a long question.

In fact, yes, there are farmers in my riding who have asked me about freedom for their wheat and barley. I have also talked to a lot of the pro-Wheat Board people.

It is interesting that when I told them about the potential for the Wheat Board to evolve and that they would still have the opportunity to sell their wheat and barley through the Canadian Wheat Board, a number of them said they would not do that. I said, “What? You want the Wheat Board, so why would you not sell it?” They replied that their farms were their businesses, so they would not sell it through the Wheat Board.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to inform you that I will share my time with the member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles.

To be able to truly have a thorough debate on Bill C-18 and the negative implications it will have on prairie farmers, we must first answer some initial questions to learn about the history of the institution at the heart of Bill C-18. Where did the Canadian Wheat Board come from? What was behind its creation? What role did it play in the past in the lives of farmers? What role does it play today in the economy and lives of prairie farmers?

The Canadian Wheat Board, whose future is at stake in Bill C-18, is an organization that markets wheat, durum and barley for prairie farmers. Recognized as the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world, the Canadian Wheat Board, which is what Bill C-18 is all about, was created in the 1920s, when farmers in western Canada started to join together to get the best price on the wheat market.

It reminds us of the farmers' fight to protect their interests against powerful foreign companies that tried to crush and destroy them. In 1943, continuing that fight, farmers in western Canada opened a single desk that allowed them to sell their wheat through the board. The pooled sales that began through this single desk gave farmers a powerful voice in grain handling and transportation as well as international trade policy.

The board ensures that farmers get the highest overall returns as they have an effective monopoly on wheat sales since there are no competing sellers of western Canadian wheat. The single desk structure provided financial stability, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply. In other words, the single desk contributed to progressive marketing of wheat in the interests of farmers, not of large American or other foreign companies.

The single desk continues to play the same role today, as the board is controlled, directed and funded by farmers. It is not a burden on the state and it is not government-funded. It was in this spirit that the act to create the Canadian Wheat Board gave the board the mandate to generate the best possible returns for farmers by taking advantage of the powers given to this single desk.

This organization continues to play an important role for farmers as well as for the economy in the Prairies. It sells grain all around the world and arranges for its transportation from thousands of farms to customers in 70 countries. About 21 million tonnes of wheat and barley are marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board each year. Given that 80% of the wheat grown in western Canada each year is exported overseas, it is easy to understand the major role that the Canadian Wheat Board plays. Yet the Conservatives want to dismantle it to benefit private companies that are more concerned about profit than about farmers, who create jobs for a large number of Canadians. Acting as a marketing agent for farmers, the Canadian Wheat Board negotiates international sales and passes the returns back to farmers, who spend them in Canada.

Clearly, the Canadian Wheat Board has real, tangible benefits for the economy of the Prairies. The Conservatives are attacking those benefits with Bill C-18. I find this completely unbelievable. What is

the purpose of Bill C-18, which the Conservatives have brought before this Parliament? Bill C-18 proposes dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board; putting an end to the single-desk marketing of wheat and barley; replacing the board with an interim structure with voluntary membership; and privatizing it or dissolving it completely if, in the coming years, it is not profitable for any private firms.

Bill C-18 is a reflection of the neo-liberalism that underlies economic policy. Dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board would have a devastating effect on prairie farmers.

• (1625)

At a time when the Canadian economy needs measures to get unemployed Canadians back to work, the idea of doing away with the Canadian Wheat Board seems ridiculous and irresponsible.

That is why when prairie farmers—who would be the most affected—were called upon to vote on this government initiative on September 12, 2011, they rejected the idea, even though the government likes to tell anyone who will listen that dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board would be good for farmers. A majority of farmers voted in favour of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board. Of a total of 38,261 farmers who voted, 62% voted to maintain a single desk for the marketing of wheat and 51% voted for the same for barley. Acting against the will of the majority is undemocratic and we will not accept it.

The NDP believes that in the current sluggish economic context, the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board would have an incalculable impact on the lives of farmers as well as on the economy of the Prairies, given the role that the Canadian Wheat Board has played and continues to play. Passed without any clear analysis of the repercussions it could have on farmers in western Canada, the measure to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board will be ruinous for them. The bill serves the interests of major American grain companies by allowing them to lower the market price for wheat and undermine the security of our own farmers.

If the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled, Prairie farmers will sell as individuals, which could result in some farmers losing their farms to huge foreign companies.

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Western Canadian farmers might experience the same fate their Australian counterparts did when they lost their single desk. Right now, the price of Australian wheat, which once commanded \$99 a tonne over American wheat, has dropped, in just three years, to \$27 a tonne below U.S. wheat. As a result, 40,000 Australian farmers who were running their own grain marketing system became customers of one of the largest agribusiness corporations, which is privately owned and based in the United States. Since 2006, Australia's national wheat sales have dropped from 100% to 23%. Meanwhile, 25 other corporations are competing to see how to make a profit on the discrepancy between buying and selling prices.

Let us make responsible decisions. Let us avoid putting our western Canadian farmers in a situation similar to that of their Australian counterparts.

I would like to remind the House that the Canadian Wheat Board sells Canadian farmers' grain products in 70 countries. All the profits from these sales—between \$4 billion and \$7 billion per year—go to the farmers. In 2009-10, the Wheat Board's revenue was estimated at approximately \$5.2 billion and its administrative costs were approximately \$75 million.

This is revenue that we will lose if we dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. By reducing the benefits that farmers receive from the Wheat Board by virtue of the fact that it is the sole seller of western Canadian wheat and barley, the Wheat Board's demise will no doubt affect the Port of Churchill and the farmers who deliver grain through the port, because the Wheat Board is the primary user of this port. Generally speaking, Wheat Board shipments account for 95% of the cargo that goes through the port. In a free market, private grain companies will have no incentive to use the Port of Churchill, since they have port facilities on the west coast, in Thunder Bay and along the St. Lawrence.

The demise of the Wheat Board will also affect producer car shippers and short-line railways in that farmers who load their own cars will save from \$1,000 to \$1,500 in preparation and cleaning fees per car that is shipped.

The demise of the Wheat Board will also have financial repercussions on Winnipeg and Manitoba. In fact, studies have shown that the Wheat Board contributes \$94.6 million to Winnipeg's gross output.

In conclusion, dismantling such an institution in the name of blind neo-liberalism means sacrificing prairie Canadians to benefit foreign grain companies. We cannot support such a bill, which would mean supporting government control over the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1630)

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member's main argument was given at the end of her presentation when she said that because of the 400 jobs, some of which could be lost in Winnipeg, she could not support the legislation. I would like her to think about why she would place such a high importance on the jobs of people working at the Wheat Board and ignore the people who will clearly benefit from this change, who are the farmers. There are tens of thousands of farmers across the west who would benefit.

For example, I have farm land in Alberta and Saskatchewan. Seven farmers are renting land from me. Every single one of them is excited about what is happening with the Wheat Board as we remove the monopoly. Every single one of them has been waiting for years to have this happen. They often ask me when we are going to get it done. We are going to get it done now.

Why does the member place such a high importance on the jobs with the Wheat Board? I, too, am sorry that those jobs will be lost, but why does she place little importance on the farmers who are the people who produce this commodity and really should benefit from it and market it in the way they see fit?

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I would simply like to tell him that my comments cannot be summarized by just the end of my presentation. I clearly stressed the essential role of the Canadian Wheat Board, which is a vital component of the prairie economy, and the fact that dismantling it would be ruinous for farmers. We are in a very critical time, given our current economic situation, and I think dismantling it would be truly ruinous for all farmers.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the prairie grain farmers are intelligent individuals and they have had ample opportunity over the last number of months and years to get a very good assessment of what the Canadian Wheat Board is all about, the pros and the cons. The Wheat Board is there first and foremost to serve farmers and to try to maximize the return to farmers. Through that we are assisting the economy of Canada and we are feeding the world. Sixty-two per cent of farmers have indicated they want to retain the Wheat Board. The government seems to be determined to discredit the plebiscite. It does not like the results of the plebiscite and therefore it is saying it was flawed.

I wonder if my New Democratic colleague would provide some comment on the attitude of the government with regard to the plebiscite.

• (1635)

[Translation]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the question. I think the government is continuing to ignore the very people most affected by this. This reminds me of Bill C-11, where the people most concerned are being completely ignored. The same thing is happening with Bill C-18. The people most affected are being ignored.

The Conservatives think they are the only ones who can speak for all farmers, and that is simply not true. The fact that they are ignoring the plebiscite that was held proves that they are not listening to all farmers.

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Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I will speak to Bill C-18. I wish to support the coherent views on this bill brilliantly expressed by my colleagues and stand up for the farming families in western Canada who, in these tough economic times, must fight not only global economic instability, but also the destructive actions taken by their own government.

Bill C-18, as proposed by the government, quite simply must be scrapped because the provisions of this new legislation jeopardize the financial stability of western wheat farmers and of all families associated with the sector.

By attacking the Canadian Wheat Board without just cause, the government is conducting a political and ideological crusade because of the supposed benefits of the open market. However, our national economy needs to be protected and supported more than ever. The Canadian Wheat Board is a long-standing organization that has proven itself and been a powerful force through the years and the economic downturns that have occurred since it was established in the 1920s.

It is also imperative to remind Canadians that the board was created by farmers for farmers, that it is managed solely by farmers, and that it is funded entirely by farmers. No taxpayer money is given to this organization, which is not a crown corporation.

The first question that Canadians are entitled to ask is the following: what is the government doing? Once again, this is poorly-disguised political interference for the purpose of increasing the Conservatives' control over self-managed organizations that are necessary and work well, all in the name of market liberalization.

Canadians are not fools. They know that this politically motivated gesture will ultimately weaken Canadian wheat production and benefit big international grain companies that will be happy to snatch up Canadian grain at lower prices. Without the board's negotiating power, individual farmers will lose their voice and the guarantee of the best price for their crop on the world market. In this dark hour when an unprecedented recession is hanging over our heads like the sword of Damocles, the government should be focusing on protecting our economy instead of lining the pockets of big multinational grain companies to the detriment of all western Canadian families.

Is this government so out of touch with reality that it forgets to listen to its people, who are demonstrating in the streets right now for economic action and a more equitable distribution of wealth? Before it leads the Canadian nation into the abyss, even going so far as endangering the country's food sovereignty, the government ought to hear what western farmers want and then respect their choice.

Canadians also need to know that the Canadian Wheat Board generates between \$4 billion and \$7 billion a year in revenue. In 2009-10, the Wheat Board recorded profits of \$5.2 billion and had operating costs of just \$75 million—I am talking about net profit. In total, over 21 million tonnes of wheat and barley are sold each year at the best possible price on the world market as a result of the Wheat Board's marketing ability and its negotiating power.

The Wheat Board is also a single desk that facilitates access to the world market for farmers who do not necessarily have all the

resources they need to reach their buyers. The Wheat Board is also a marketing agent that does not keep any profit; rather, it returns all its revenue to the 75,000 farmers that it represents who, thanks to the Wheat Board, are able to sell their grain in 70 countries. Above all, the Wheat Board is a strong and unique voice that is well represented on the world grain markets, a voice that the Prime Minister's government stubbornly refuses to hear.

What Canadians understand about Bill C-18 is that the measures proposed by the government will be extremely harmful to our economy.

• (1640)

The dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board would weaken our farmers' bargaining power with their buyers, since these farmers would have to fight alone to get the best selling price and they would be competing with their neighbours.

Ultimately, lower selling prices for grain will cost farmers hundreds of millions of dollars. Instead of going into the pockets of our Canadian families, these millions of dollars will go into the pockets of grain conglomerates, which will have the final say on the purchase price of our wheat and barley. Obviously, the government would rather satisfy big multinational corporations instead of the Canadian people.

In the long term, we can expect that, as a result of these measures, a number of family farms will shut down once they are no longer profitable, which will in turn increase the vulnerability of families in the west.

Why would the government want to jeopardize the existence of an organization that is not losing jobs, that earns profits for our farmers, that is managed well and that, at the end of the day, has nothing but positive effects on our economy? If this organization were to disappear, there would be all kinds of negative effects on the entire community.

The government claims that it wants to allow farmers to choose whether they market their crops with or without the board. With the potential dismantling of the board, the government is not giving western farmers any choice. There have been no studies of the impact of this decision. I remain convinced that the farmers concerned are particularly shocked to see that the government is taking big risks with their income and their retirement without bothering to do its homework.

Canadians have had enough of a government that does not listen to their needs, that is completely out of touch, and that dares to lie to them at will.

The government tells anyone who will listen and believe that it is keeping its election promises. How is this possible when it promised to broadly consult farmers before last May's election? A few days after May 2, the government announced that there would be no plebiscite on the Canadian Wheat Board.

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In the speech he gave yesterday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, with the support of his Prime Minister, embellished the lie by arguing that these new measures will give farmers more freedom and choice. However Canadians are well aware that, in this rather scandalous matter, there is no freedom or choice for the 62% majority who said they were in favour of keeping this single desk. No freedom, no choice, not even the right to speak and be heard.

The government's lack of respect for western farmers gets worse. In its own press release, it dares to state that it consulted with stakeholders from across the value chain before making a decision. Does this mean that farmers—including the 62% who want to keep the board—are not part of the value chain for their own products, since they were not consulted?

I am sure that western farmers will be shocked to hear that this government has excluded them altogether from the value chain for products—

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Excuse me, I understand there is no translation.

●(1645)

[*Translation*]

It does not work if I speak French.

[*English*]

Now it is working. Continue, please.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: I am certain that western farmers will be shocked to hear that this government has excluded them altogether from the value chain for the products that they have produced by the sweat of their brow.

[*English*]

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I hear the NDP using the Wheat Board's talking points, in particular the 62%. The 62% plebiscite was a flawed process.

First, the Canadian Wheat Board selected who did and did not get ballots. Not all farmers were allowed to participate in the plebiscite. A good example is my father and brother. They are organic farmers who want to grow organic wheat, but one of the reasons they do not is that it is so difficult to be involved with the Wheat Board. They would get less money for their wheat because it gets pooled with all the other wheat, and they would not get the premiums that organic wheat brings in the marketplace. They do not grow organic wheat and they never got the chance to vote in that plebiscite.

The other issue is that the plebiscite never asked if farmers wanted a voluntary wheat board. They were only given two choices: a wheat board or no board, a monopoly or no monopoly. There was no in between.

What we are offering through this legislation is a strong voluntary wheat board. If 62% of producers who were selected to get ballots in the mail from the Wheat Board support the wheat board, that is a great endorsement. They should be able to easily survive as a voluntary organization. They do not need 100% of the acres grown,

they do not need 100% of the grain that is grown, they do not need to sell every bushel. A committed group of people, 62% of grain farmers, will support a voluntary wheat board. It may even be higher than that if they are given the chance to compete in the marketplace.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure that I heard a question, unless there was a mistake in the interpretation.

When one is part of an association or a group, there is always a membership. Obviously, one needs to be a member and there are rules. Yesterday, I went to a meeting of an association that has to do with Europe but, since I had not gotten my membership card seven days in advance, I could not participate.

Western wheat and barley farmers make up the majority of this board, which works and is profitable. Why dismantle something that is profitable? We are in an economic race, which the Conservatives are always talking about. This board represents jobs for families and it is profitable. Let us keep it.

[*English*]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am from Ontario and the hon. member is from Quebec. Farmers in Quebec, by the way, in case she does not know, have the same opportunities that the western farmers are now going to have, which is choice of marketing.

I wonder if she had many farmers come to her before she was elected to say that they did not want the choice of marketing for their products.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I must say that, geographically, the riding of Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles is very far from western Canada. The agricultural reality in Quebec is very different and, in Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, there is no agriculture at all. The people in my riding therefore have not come to me to talk about agriculture.

In matters of health, medicine and surgery, does one have to have had a heart attack in order to be a cardiologist and perform surgery? No. And so, I will speak on the subject of the Wheat Board. If we listened to the Conservatives, we would replace all of this with free trade and free zones. It is becoming a way of doing things. It goes without saying that small farming families who can now put their products on the market will be eliminated.

●(1650)

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Palliser.

Government Orders

I appreciate this opportunity to rise and support this piece of legislation, because I believe it is going to provide western Canadian wheat and barley farmers with the freedom that they have long desired: the ability to market their own grain and to make their own business decisions.

Our government's top priority is the economy, and in my part of the world and in every part of Canada, agriculture is a significant portion of our economy. To quote an old saying, "If you ate today, thank a farmer". I represent a lot of farmers in my constituency, and let me thank each and every one of them not only for feeding us but for driving our economy forward.

Our government has taken concrete action when it comes to the agriculture sector. Over the past six years, our ministers have driven the issue of agriculture forward in unprecedented ways. As our current minister is fond of saying, "We are putting farmers first".

I and many of my caucus colleagues come from rural roots. On this side of the House we understand the important issues relating to agriculture and we know that it is an important portion of our economy. We understand the issues that are actually facing people in the agricultural industry.

Our hon. Minister of Agriculture continues to do his work to open additional markets around the world and has come back with real results for our farmers and our food processors.

We are moving forward with a number of free trade agreements with important markets for our grains and our agricultural products as well. We have Colombia out the door and we are working on a number of other markets, including the European Union. We are pressing for an ambitious outcome at the WTO for the benefit of Canada's entire agricultural sector. We continue to stand up for our industry to ensure that trade is grounded on fair rules and sound science.

Here at home, Canada's economic action plan is helping the grain industry take a more strategic approach to marketing grain.

As Canada positions itself for future growth, we need a strong and profitable agricultural industry now more than ever.

Research is key in keeping our grain sector strong and competitive. That is why our government has invested significantly in research to benefit grain farmers in western Canada. Budget 2010 provided \$51.7 million over two years to support the operations of the Canadian Grain Commission. We have invested over \$11 million to help the Canadian International Grains Institute open new doors in international markets. Almost \$30 million has been allocated to support research clusters for wheat, barley, pulses and canola.

With these investments, we are putting farmers first, creating more jobs for Canadians and positioning our economy for future growth.

When we look at the tremendous accomplishments of our Canadian agriculture industry over the past 100 years, we see that the Canadian grains sector stands out as a great success story in its own right. Today, Canadian wheat, barley and other grains are known by our customers all over the world for their outstanding quality, consistency, cleanliness and innovation.

Each year Canada's grain industry does \$16 billion worth of business here in Canada and around the world. Those dollars drive the economies of both rural and urban Canada. They create and sustain jobs right through the grain production chain, from farm input suppliers to elevators to farm families to transporters and processors. These dollars create jobs and prosperity for Canadians here at home and support our rural communities, communities that contribute much to the Canadian economy.

Canadian grain growers sustain our health and the well-being of Canadians by putting bread on our tables, and that we must never forget.

But with all of this success, one has to wonder why Canada's share of the overall wheat exports continues to fall, while growth in canola and pulses expands at an increasing rate. The share of area seeded accounted for by the Canadian Wheat Board or board grains in western Canada has decreased dramatically over the past 25 years, from an average of about 85% to approximately 54% of the acreage that is seeded in western Canada.

• (1655)

The shift into canola represents the single biggest factor for this reduction. Why are farmers shifting to canola? Stu Innes, a farmer in Saskatchewan, says that for five years farmers "have rid themselves of the Wheat Board in the only way that they could—by not growing wheat or barley".

We know that by providing marketing freedom for farmers, wheat and barley can once again have a strong position in our country. When western Canadian grain farmers have the freedom to make their own business decisions and sell their grain to the buyer of their choice, they will be able to capture new opportunities. In fact, Curt Vossen, the president of Richardson International Ltd., believes the end of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly "...is going to open up 20 to 25 million new tonnes of marketing opportunities for companies inside and outside Canada".

Today our customers continue to choose Canadian grain over the competition, not because of the Canadian Wheat Board but because of the relentless commitment to quality by all parts of the value chain, including, and first and foremost, the farmer. When Canada's global customers purchase Canadian grain for processing, they can count on getting the consistent quality and cleanliness that they have come to expect, load after load.

I would remind members that the Canadian Wheat Board is an administrator. It is not a decision maker on varieties registered for production here in Canada, and neither are grain companies. It is the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that oversees the registration of wheat varieties and it is the mandate of the Canadian Grain Commission to ensure Canada's high quality standards are maintained. Under marketing freedom, both agencies would continue that important work.

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Our government knows that innovation drives competitiveness in agriculture. We are keeping our wheat producers on the leading edge of innovation through investments in the wheat genome and fusarium-resistant varieties. We are helping our scientists deliver new solutions to our growers, as they did over a century ago. We will ensure that the great work done by the Western Grains Research Foundation, the Canadian International Grains Institute and the Canadian Malting Barley Technical Centre continue to keep Canada out in front.

Forward thinking, not fearmongering, made Canada the world's supplier of choice for wheat. As was the case a century ago, marketing freedom would breathe new life into our grain industry. It would open the window to new investment in innovation and value-added potential on the prairie soil. Farmers would be able to contract directly with processors to deliver the consistency and quality customers demand.

The grain industry is changing, and the legislative tools required to keep the industry competitive need to change accordingly. There has been a lot of emphasis on a broader range of crops in western Canada, on identity preservation, on niche marketing and on processing of grains in Canada. The biofuels industry, supported by initiatives put into place by this government, has become a major customer for grains. The reform of the Western Grain Transportation Act in the mid-1990s triggered wholesale diversification as producers opted to market their grains through livestock or switched to other crops such as oilseeds, pulses or horticultural crops.

Today wheat is one of many crops on the Prairies. In the 1950s, three-quarters of the land was wheat; that is not the case today.

Likewise, marketing structures are evolving. The Canadian Wheat Board monopoly on wheat and barley was imposed by Parliament as a war measures act to supply cheap wheat to Britain 70 years ago during World War II. The system was essentially designed to collect the grain produced by thousands of small farmers at a small country elevator, market it around the world as a uniform commodity and divide the returns from this process among all the producers who delivered the grain. Today those dynamics have changed, and our approaches and structures need to change with them.

• (1700)

The idea of simply selling one uniform commodity made sense in the days when few countries dominated the grain export market and quasi-government buyers negotiated long-term supply contracts on a national level. Today, that is not the case and the Canadian Wheat Board needs to change because farmers have changed and the world has changed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask almost the same question that I asked another member earlier because I did not receive a very clear or convincing answer.

Members of the government seem very confident in the fact that the decision they are making to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board is well founded and that they have the support of all farmers, of all western Canadian farmers. I would like to know whether the Conservative member and the government would be prepared to

hold a referendum on this issue so that farmers themselves can say what they really think.

I do not want him to give me the same response as before, in other words, that they have so many members in western Canada or that the survey that was conducted was not well founded. I would like a yes or no answer as to whether they would be prepared to hold a referendum to ask farmers what they really think about the Canadian Wheat Board.

[*English*]

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, I am convinced that the farmers I represent, especially young farmers who are excited about new opportunities and hoping for change, are as smart as the farmers who are in Quebec and Ontario, the farmers that the member may represent. I believe my farmers have the same capacity to market their product and they need to have the same opportunity as the farmers in Ontario and Quebec.

I hope the hon. member believes that the farmers that I represent can do the same thing that the farmers in his communities and his province can do. I believe they are smart enough and I hope he does too, and will support our legislation.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am wondering what my colleague thinks of the Liberal supported treatment of a Canadian farmer from Quebec selling his own product to someone in Vermont, compared to the Liberal supported treatment of a Canadian farmer from Alberta selling his own products to someone in Montana.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, it is a very timely question. It is a disturbing reality when we look at the numbers out today what the price is that farmers in western Canada are being offered by the Canadian Wheat Board. Today, the fixed price is \$7.52. The pool outlook is \$9.47. If I had the freedom and my brother had the freedom to sell grain in North Dakota today, we would be getting \$12.47. Those are the opportunities that are given to people who live in Quebec and in Ontario. I believe the people that I represent should have that same opportunity to get true value for the quality products that they produce.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the hon. member for Peace River. I have spoken privately to the hon. member about this very heated debate. Clearly, farmers are on both sides of the issue.

I am quite taken with the fact that a very conservative economic expert publication, *The Economist* magazine, has put forward that removing the Wheat Board, as the government proposes to do, would have a devastating impact “devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income”.

I know that there are sincere differences of opinion in the House, but I would appreciate the hon. member's view of this particular expert opinion.

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Speaker, this is an important point. Small farmers in my constituency, especially small farmers who are young, innovative and want to create a unique product, in many cases an organic product, cannot do it under the Canadian Wheat Board. Currently, the Wheat Board takes that quality, unique niche product, that someone has spent a significant portion of time getting their land to organic quality producing an organic wheat, and takes that crop and pools it in with all the other farmers' crops so that farmer has no opportunity to market a quality, unique niche crop.

I would urge the Green Party to consider changing its policy because the Green candidate in my constituency opposed the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly simply for this reason. There were candidates for the Green Party who were opposing the stated position of the Green Party and one was in my constituency because this is an assault on young farmers, including the young farmer who ran against me for the Green Party. If the member wants to support the Green candidate in my constituency, I urge the hon. member to stand in her place and support this legislation.

• (1705)

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this bill on the Canadian Wheat Board. Our government is committed to the continued success of Canadian agriculture and because this government believes that western Canadian grain farmers deserve the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world.

We want to ensure that Canadian farmers succeed and build a strong future for the sector as a whole. Our government's top priority is the economy in which the agricultural industry plays a key role.

We believe that farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the market opportunities that are open to them. We put farmers first in every decision we make on agriculture.

We recognize that this is a major change for agriculture in western Canada. That is why we have been consulting extensively with stakeholders from across the supply chain, from the farm to the seaport.

Over the summer a working group comprised of experts in the field consulted with industries and heard a broad range of advice on how the grain marketing and transportation system could transition from the current CWB-run system to an open market that would include voluntary marketing pools.

The working group submitted its report to the hon. Minister of Agriculture. It covers a wide range of issues from transportation to research to elevators, basically the how of moving to an open market. The working group is one of the ways our government sought advice on how to move forward.

Our formula is simple and it works: we listen to farmers, we work with farmers, and then we deliver the practical results farmers need.

Let us take a minute and look at opening world markets that are on the doorstep for Canadian agriculture.

Canadian farmers have proven time and time again that they can compete and succeed in the global marketplace if they have a level playing field. That is why the government has been working very hard to build new opportunities in global markets for our farmers.

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We have been on the road a lot and our efforts to build trade relationships are paying off. The hon. Minister of Agriculture has led trade missions to key markets in Europe, Asia, South America, Africa and the Middle East.

Working closely with the industry, we have completed over 30 international trade missions and returned home with some real tangible results for our farmers, producers and processors. Everywhere we go, we are finding new customers who want to buy Canadian good quality foodstuffs.

Together we have been moving a lot of product, and we have delivered some real results to our farmers and processors. The government knows farmers want to make their living in the marketplace and not from the mailbox. That is why we have gotten out on the world stage, whether it is serving up Canadian steak in Brussels or canola oil in Mexico, to ensure our farmers can connect with new customers.

We have reopened and expanded access for Canadian cattle, beef, beef products and bovine genetics in China, Hong Kong, Colombia, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Panama, Singapore, Costa Rica, Vietnam and Korea.

We have also reopened and expanded access for Canadian pork and swine in China, Malaysia, Mongolia, Russia, the Philippines, Ukraine, Armenia, Albania, Croatia, Indonesia, Jordan and Thailand.

We have negotiated new duty free access for Canadian hormone-free beef to the European Union, a promising market, estimated to be worth more than \$10 million annually. As of July 2011, industry has shipped approximately 626 tonnes of beef, worth almost \$5 million.

We have developed new opportunities in China for up to \$500 million in sales for pulses and achieved transitional measures that allow access to the Chinese market for Canadian world-class canola, safeguarding a market worth \$1.8 billion.

We have succeeded in agreements and set up relationships with India to find a long-term solution on pulse fumigation while ensuring uninterrupted supply of pulses, safeguarding a market worth \$533 million in 2009. Of course, there is more work to do.

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Let us take a minute and look at trade negotiations with the WTO and FTA. Agriculture trade is critical to Canada's economy and prosperity. In 2010 our agriculture and agri-food exports were over \$35 billion. Importantly, Canada's trade in agriculture and agri-food products contributed \$11.1 billion to our trade surplus.

•(1710)

Those dollars mean jobs and livelihoods for Canadians here at home. That is why when we, as a government, take measures to support agricultural trade, we are not just helping farmers, we are helping all Canadians.

Canada hosted the Cairns Group ministerial meeting in Saskatoon in early September to press ahead with a stronger rule-based approach to global agricultural trade. At the WTO, we stand ready to work with our trading partners to define a realistic path forward on the Doha round, which would provide for more open and predictable multilateral trading systems.

Our government is also pursuing an aggressive regional and bilateral trade negotiation agenda. In that regard, we are working toward a comprehensive economic and trade agreement with the European Union.

The EU is Canada's second most important partner for trade and investment with two-way agriculture and seafood trade totalling over \$6 billion in 2010. We want to make that relationship even stronger and more profitable for the benefit of our farmers.

We will also begin free trade negotiations with Morocco in the very near future. Morocco is an important and growing market for our wheat and pulse exports.

We are making important progress in other markets. We have recently implemented a free trade agreement with the European Free Trade Association, Peru and Colombia. The free trade agreement with the EFTA will eliminate or reduce tariffs on certain agricultural products from Canada, including durum wheat, frozen french fries, crude oil, beer and frozen blueberries.

Canadian producers will also benefit from the elimination of tariffs on exports to Peru and Colombia. Many agricultural exports such as beef, pork, wheat, barley and pulses will receive immediate duty free access. Notably, the FTA with Colombia marks a significant opportunity for Canadian exporters to now benefit from the preferential treatment and access as their American competitors.

We have also signed free trade agreements with Jordan, Panama and Honduras. This government is working toward implementation of these free trade agreements as early as possible.

We are hopeful that our ongoing free trade agreements negotiated with South Korea, El Salvador, Guatemala, India, Ukraine and the Caribbean community will also soon create export opportunities for our agricultural producers in these markets. As well, we are looking ahead to export new possibilities with trading partners like Japan and Turkey.

Let us look at the marketing we are currently headed toward.

We want Canadian farmers and processors to get the credit they deserve for the high quality products they are bringing to market.

Our agriculture exporters are innovative and competitive, and we are working with them to expand their markets.

Canada is working on all fronts to boost our agricultural business with the world. We know that buyers and consumers already think highly of Canadians and Canadian products. We want to raise awareness and boost the appetite for our great Canadian agricultural economy. That is why our government is investing \$32 million in the Canada brand initiative to boost the Canada brand in key markets. The goal is to get more consumers putting our great Canadian food products in their grocery carts and on their menus. We have already announced branding strategies in Japan, Mexico and Korea.

These dollars are supporting market research, advertising, store features, culinary tourism, and other promotional activities that bolster the work being done by the Canadian industry to sell the products. Consumers are looking for variety, quality and safety in their food, and our farmers and processors can deliver. When they think of good food, we want them to think Canadian and then buy Canadian.

The goal of these initiatives is to get more international customers bidding on our great Canadian food and help our farmers make the most of international markets. Opening up the markets for durum wheat and barley farmers will attract investment not only from Canadian companies, but from the international community as well. In fact, the head of Bunge North American division said, "Bunge is absolutely planning to be a part of it" and Bill Jamieson, chairman of the National Cattle Feeders' Association, said, "More access to more markets will create more opportunities and profit for grain producers".

•(1715)

In closing, we believe all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the market opportunities that are open to them. Once passed, this legislation would provide western Canadian grain farmers with endless opportunities for their business. I urge my hon. colleagues to stand up for western Canadian farmers and support the bill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to all the numbers and all the opportunities referred to by my colleague across the floor. I thank him for his efforts.

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However, I have a question about the Canadian Wheat Board. I am not talking about a so-called analysis conducted by a group of non-government workers. I would like to know why the government refuses to take responsibility when it comes to managing taxpayers' money. This is a recurring theme with this government, whether we are talking about the cost of new prisons, F-35 fighter jets or the minister's pet projects in his riding.

Has the government done a cost analysis of the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board? Yes or no? And if so, what were the results?

[*English*]

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure exactly what the question was, except there was some indication that maybe there was spending of dollars by government around the Wheat Board question which should not have been spent. Let me respond to that by saying we agree. We do not want to spend dollars on a foolish kind of referendum for which we already know the results. People have told us the results.

Our position has been and continues to be one of choice. Farmers do not need to vote one way or the other. We are saying they have a choice. They can go with the private sector. They can go with the other private sector. They can go with the Canadian Wheat Board. They can go with some other grain buyers. That is what is being said. That is what the bill is promoting.

People have not read the bill, obviously, because the bill is in phases over five years for the Canadian Wheat Board to develop its own marketing system. It is not one of hindrance; it is one of acceptance. I cannot understand why people have not picked up on that theme.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's contribution to this discussion. I think it is an important discussion. I appreciate the fact that I have been recognized as many of the other folks have on the other side of this chamber who have talked about this being a major issue. I do appreciate the opportunity to interject at this point.

I have heard from countless young members of my farming community who are desperate to see this change. They want to see an innovative market. They want to see a market for their barley and their wheat that drives up their returns. We are looking at the organic farmers. We are looking at the guys who want to create niche markets, who want to be able to containerize their product and send it abroad through producer cars or a whole host of other things.

Would the hon. member talk about the changes in this legislation that would allow more of these guys who are looking for unique ways to market their product? Does he believe there would be support in his community for these changes for the ability to create unique and niche crops and marketing wheat and barley that is grown organically or some other way for specific markets?

• (1720)

Mr. Ray Boughen: Mr. Speaker, in response to the hon. member's question, as the hon. member mentioned earlier, the Canadian Wheat Board is not a facilitating operation in terms of expansion, new ideas and innovative technologies. It is very cut and dried: "Bring your wheat. Here you go. Good-bye. See you."

The new marketing ideas that young people have, the new formulas they have for growing crops, their interest in expanding and their creativity is not facilitated by the Canadian Wheat Board. It never has been and it probably never will be. That is why it is important that we put in place, as a government, an opportunity for young people to expand their expertise, to expand their growing seasons, to do different things with their crop rotation. We want them to be fully-fledged business people marketing their own goods, as they do now in grains such as canola, flax and oats. They market those grains themselves. This is not a new thing for people in the agricultural sector. It is just an expansion of what they are currently doing.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-18 and in support of the Canadian Wheat Board. The board is the largest and most prosperous grain marketing board in the world. It sells grain around the globe. It makes arrangements for shipping grain from thousands of farmers to consumers in over 70 countries. In an average year, the board puts some 21 million tonnes of wheat and barley on the market.

In addition, all profits from these sales, between \$4 million and \$7 million a year, are paid back entirely to farmers. The board does not hold on to any income, apart from what it needs to cover costs and manage the financial risks.

The board mitigates the risks run by farmers, particularly concerning late payments, selling grain to buyers at inappropriate times and shipping the grain to buyers. This is a key problem, considering the large geographic area of the Prairies.

Batch selling has also allowed farmers to have a significant influence on the handling and shipping of grain, and on international trade policies. The board works in partnership with the industry and the government to promote policies concerning trade, transport and other areas that benefit wheat and barley farmers in western Canada. The board has defended farmers remarkably well in cases of unfounded trade disputes and has won important victories that resulted in better fees and rail service.

The board's single desk structure has ensured financial stability, sound risk management and secure supply chains, an indisputable advantage for farmers.

[*English*]

Furthermore, the Canadian Wheat Board is not a government-funded agency or a crown corporation. The Canadian Wheat Board is not funded by Canadian taxpayers. Farmers pay for its operations from their grain revenue.

Ten of the 15 members of the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board are elected by farmers. Farmers consistently elect a majority of directors who support the single desk structure.

The Conservatives have no mandate to go against the wishes of prairie farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board is controlled, directed and funded by farmers. Farmers should be the ones to decide the future of the marketing organization that they run and they pay for.

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They have made their decision clear. The results of the Canadian Wheat Board plebiscite released on September 12 show that a strong majority of farmers want to maintain their ability to market wheat and barley through a single desk system. Sixty-two per cent of respondents voted in favour of retaining the single desk for wheat, and 51% voted to retain it for barley. A total of 38,261 farmers submitted mail-in ballots in the plebiscite, a participation rate of 56%, on par with the last three federal elections and higher than many municipal and provincial elections.

• (1725)

[*Translation*]

Canada runs the risk of losing \$200 million to \$500 million a year in board price premiums.

The board manages a supply chain from gate to plate. It has an enviable international reputation for its quality and uninterrupted supply, its service and superior technical support.

Grain sales made under the exclusive jurisdiction of the board guarantee a secure supply of grain, thus guaranteeing strategic and orderly sales. This gives farmers a competitive advantage in the international grain market. On their own, farmers would have to sell by auction. They would have to decide whether or not to sell depending on the circumstances, a gamble that could cost them their farm.

In fact, many studies carried out by well-known agricultural economists, based on data compiled by the board, concluded that the single desk model allows Prairie farmers to bring in millions of dollars more per year than on the open market.

[*English*]

The dismantling of the single desk system will have a serious impact on communities across the Prairies. A 2005 economic impact analysis by PricewaterhouseCoopers found that the Canadian Wheat Board contributes a gross output of \$94.6 million to the city of Winnipeg. In addition to its more than 400 employees at its head office, PricewaterhouseCoopers calculated spinoff employment from the Canadian Wheat Board to be more than 2,000 jobs, with a total labour force income impact on the city of more than \$66 million. At the provincial level, PricewaterhouseCoopers put the Canadian Wheat Board's gross output contribution at \$323 million with more than 3,000 jobs and a total labour income impact of more than \$140 million.

The Conservatives have argued that the Ontario experience with removing the single desk can be applied to western farmers, but one cannot compare apples to oranges. The examples are completely different. Ontario wheat farmers produce wheat for pastries, cookies and cakes. They have a ready market available locally. In contrast, prairie wheat farmers produce hard red spring wheat which does not have an extensive local market. Ontario wheat farmers sell about 90% of their product within Canada and the northern U.S., but 80% of the wheat grown in western Canada each year is exported overseas. That means while Ontario farmers have low transportation distances and costs, prairie wheat farmers must pay freight costs to transport grain long distances to inland terminals and to port.

Of course, the other crucial difference between the Ontario experience and the measure being discussed here is Ontario wheat

farmers ended their single desk system through a farmer-led democratic process. Prairie farmers have voted in favour of keeping the Canadian Wheat Board and face having it taken away against their will.

A better comparison can be found in Australia. Western grain farmers can look to Australia to know what is in store for them when the single desk is eradicated, and it is not pretty. When the Australian wheat board had its single desk power, wheat could command a premium of over \$99 a tonne over the American wheat, but by December 2008, it had dropped to a discount of \$27 a tonne below U.S. wheat. In three short years Australia's 40,000 wheat farmers went from running their own grain marketing system, virtually all of Australia's wheat, which was 12% of the world's wheat production worth \$5 billion, selling it on their own behalf, to being mere customers of Cargill, one of the world's largest agribusiness corporations, which is privately owned and based in the United States.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Before making any changes to the board, the government must study the impact of its dismantling and analyze the effects this would have on Canadian grain farmers. Otherwise, it is playing Russian roulette with the Prairie economy and with the revenue sources of western farmers.

Allen Orberg, a farmer and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, has said that this government's imprudent approach will derail the Canadian grain industry. It threatens the future of a sector with \$5 billion in exports every year. It will take money out of the pockets of Canadian farmers and give it to American corporations.

[*English*]

In closing, the important thing is to give farmers a say. They have voted. They want to keep the Wheat Board. It is incomprehensible that the government would override the democratic will of farmers and dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Kyle Seebach (Brampton West, CPC): Madam Speaker, I do not come from a riding that has a great deal of farms. I come from an Ontario riding, so I do not necessarily understand the nuances or intricacies of the Wheat Board. What I do understand is basic economics. We continually hear from the members on the other side of the chamber that the Wheat Board is the greatest thing since sliced bread. If it is so great, then when it becomes optional for western farmers, there is going to be a stampede to stay with the Canadian Wheat Board.

I do not understand the logic that by making the best thing in the world optional is somehow going to lead to its demise. Perhaps the member opposite could correct me on how that logic is not correct.

Ms. Peggy Nash: Madam Speaker, it is simple. Democracy is the greatest thing since sliced bread and the democratic will of prairie farmers has not been respected, as it must be by law. The government is riding roughshod over a decision taken by prairie farmers who want to keep their Wheat Board. The government is saying that they are not going to have that option. The dismantling of the Wheat Board will have huge ramifications in terms of prices and the impact on our overall economy, but especially on prairie farmers. It is incomprehensible why the government would not abide by the law, respect the will of farmers and allow them to keep the Wheat Board.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could my colleague tell us what impact the loss of an institution as important as the Canadian Wheat Board would have on our national sovereignty?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

When Australia lost its equivalent of the Canadian Wheat Board, farmers lost control over their wheat. They became clients of a large American company. They lost control and became very dependent on that company, which led to loss of revenue and the destruction of that sector.

• (1735)

[*English*]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, I welcome the perspective of the member opposite, who is from downtown Toronto. Perhaps because she is from there, she is not familiar with a couple of the issues.

She referred to the survey that was taken by the Wheat Board. She probably does not know that there has been great discussion about the voters list, which has been polluted for over a decade and has not been cleared up. I would like to give a couple of examples and then ask if she can somehow justify them because she supports the results.

The father of someone close to me died last year and the ballots were sent out a couple of months ago from the Wheat Board. My friend's mother got a ballot in her husband's name and the estate got a ballot as well. One of my colleague's had a little old lady poke him and say that she wanted to talk to him about the Wheat Board. He asked what it was about and she told him that her brother and sister both got ballots and they were both dead. I have two colleagues here who are farmers and landowners who did not get ballots.

How can she and her party justify supporting this charade?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Madam Speaker, I want to inform the member opposite that food security and the well-being of farmers concerns everyone in our country. Farmers feed cities. We rely on farmers.

I have not reviewed the voters list for this plebiscite, but, surely to goodness, if the government is concerned with that list, then it should obey the law, conduct its own vote and let farmers decide the

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future of the Wheat Board. It is as simple as that. Why does it not allow the farmers the democratic right to decide whether they will be able to keep the Wheat Board? That is the government's responsibility under the law.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I truly am delighted to take part in this debate. For me personally, this is the beginning of the end of a 40 year struggle. I started 40 years ago to work to try to end the Wheat Board monopoly, but I will talk a bit about that later.

It is the end of a 70 year period during which time the Wheat Board has had a monopoly and farmers have had no choice. Marketing wheat and certain classes of barley had to be done through the board. Other grains were included during part of that time as well.

It is the beginning of the end of an era, and I am proud to be a member of a government that is doing the right thing after all of this time.

I cannot measure exactly what the benefits or the hurt caused by the Wheat Board having its monopoly. What I do know is some of the hurt caused to my father who farmed most of his life. When I was a young boy during the sixties and early seventies, I remember the harvest finally finished when fall arrived. For many of those years, my father had good crops but he could not market them. We were a large family and we did not have a lot of cash flow. I remember my father desperately trying to get money to buy boots for us for the winter. He did not have the money. I remember my father desperately trying to get enough money to pay some of the bills for fertilizer and pesticides and other farm inputs, and he could not do it. He had the grain, but he could not find a market for it. Therefore, he went out to find a market on his own and he found one for his wheat and barley across the border. It was a poor price, but at least it would provide the cash flow to help get the winter clothing for the family and to pay enough of the bills that the suppliers would send again next year.

As a result of the Wheat Board rules, my father could not cross the border to sell the grain when he found one so he could do those things for his family. I am not talking about the border with the United States. Our farm was two miles from the Saskatchewan border on the Alberta side. Because of the laws in place under the Wheat Board legislation, he was not allowed to take his grain across the border, 50 miles away, where he found a market with feeders, people feeding cattle and hogs, because the Wheat Board had to be protected.

That is what I grew up with. My father's opinion of the Wheat Board before that I do not know, but I do know he was frustrated by these restrictions put on him by the board at that time.

I am proud to say that with this legislation one of the many changes that will take place is that farmers will now be allowed to take grain across provincial borders without fear of penalty. That is a step in the right direction.

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It has been a 40 year struggle for me. It started when I took agriculture at university. In 1970 I took my first marketing course. I was fortunate enough to have as my instructor Professor Joe Richter. He came into that marketing course the very first day and said that monopolies were always a bad thing, whether they were private or government. He said, furthermore, that this applied to the Canadian Wheat Board.

I admit that a lot of my classmates were not very sure about that. They had been taught by their parents and grandparents that the Wheat Board was something almost sacred. By the end of that course, every one of my colleagues understood why the monopoly simply was not a good thing.

That was the start of my struggle, but I moved on. I went on the advisory committees of the Alberta Wheat Pool, things like that, and then 18 years ago I became involved in politics.

• (1740)

Half of my first speech as a politician was on the Wheat Board and how we had to end the monopoly. I talked about how we had to give farmers the freedom to market their grain in the fashion that they saw fit. It has been 18 years as a member of Parliament. Now, finally, it is the beginning of the end. The monopoly will be removed and we will be on to bigger and better things.

This is a rights issue. I hear all the arguments about plebiscites and other things, whether the board has offered an advantage or not. Personally, I simply do not believe those things are the issues.

The issue is rights and equality. On the equality issue, why should farmers in western Canada be treated differently and given fewer rights and options than farmers in central Canada? There is no good answer for that. No one can come up with a good answer because there is not one.

When it comes to rights, it is property rights issue. Farmers put all of the money into producing their grain. Farmers put all of the work, the sweat, the toil into producing their grain. When it comes time to sell their grain, they simply do not have a basic right that anybody else in any other industry in our country has and, in fact, that anybody else in any democratic country has. That is wrong.

This legislation is about restoring the rights to western Canadian wheat and barley growers and restoring equality so that western farmers are treated equal to eastern farmers.

People ask how we ever got into this mess in the first place. The mess started back in the early 1920s. There was a form of the Wheat Board that was put in place at that time. It was put in place absolutely respecting the rules of co-operatives. One of the basic principles, the key principle of all the co-operatives that helped build the west, was freedom, freedom to either use the co-operative or not, freedom to be a member or not. That is the way the Wheat Board was established. It was voluntary.

Then in 1935, once again, it was established as a voluntary organization. It is exactly what we are asking for right now. Farmers had a right to either market through the Wheat Board, if they chose, or to market through any grain company they wanted, if they chose to do that. That is the way the Wheat Board was established.

It was only in 1943, under the War Measures Act, when the government wanted to get cheap grain for the war effort in Europe, that the monopoly was put in place. It was put in place under the War Measures Act, why to give farmers a better price for their grain? Absolutely not. It was to get cheap grain for the war effort, and that was acceptable. In war we have to do some things we do not like to do. I am not criticizing the government of the day in any fashion.

What I am criticizing governments for is that after the war the monopoly was not removed, and it has not been to this day. That is a basic and unacceptable infringement on basic human rights and, in this case, property rights. It is time this was changed.

It is about that. All of the talk about a vote and plebiscite is not valid, because I would argue that democracy should not be used to remove basic human rights.

To use maybe a poor analogy, and I do not have much time to do it, we were all elected in the House knowing what our salaries would be. What if the Speaker decided that there would be votes in each of our constituencies, but only in the constituencies in central Canada. A vote would be held to have the people determine whether an MP should get paid or the amount an MP should be paid.

There is a vote and democracy takes place. The people decide that maybe MPs should not get paid at all or should get paid much less. It is a vote. It is democracy. That is what the members are arguing for over there. However, is it right? Of course it is not right.

• (1745)

Maybe it is not the best analogy, but whether there is a vote and all of the other arguments made whether the monopoly is good or bad is not the key issue. The key issue is we have to restore the basic right of farmers to sell their property and to do it in any way that they see fit.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by my distinguished colleague, and I would even say that I listened emotionally, since it is clear that this issue is close to his heart. I was very touched by his description of his family and his father, who tried to pay the bills by exporting his grain. His speech gave me the impression that the cooperative movement at the heart of the Canadian Wheat Board also contributed to an increase in revenue for all farmers.

Will the passage of Bill C-18 mean that smaller producers will end up facing the same problems we once managed to get rid of?

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[English]

[Translation]

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, in fact, I have absolutely no doubt nor do any of the farmers that are my neighbours and friends. I have farmland in Saskatchewan. I rent land to some. I also have some custom farm for myself, so I have grain to sell too. I know there is always a difficulty in the fall to get the cashflow needed to pay the bills. That is still a problem today, so we are limited to crops like canola to get cashflow in the fall to pay the bills.

For me personally and for my friends and my neighbours, it would be terrific to know that for wheat I grow next year I can contract that right after this legislation passes and I can lock in a price for next fall. I can actually market that wheat early in the fall, so that I have some cashflow to pay my bills and I do not have to rely on selling canola at a time when the price is low. To me this has a personal impact right now as well.

Returning the Wheat Board to what it was, and it was apparently very effective before, that is the right thing to do.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, we are talking about the sales and marketing arm of every wheat farmer out west and I understand that there are some who are going to gain from this. You have made it clear that you and some others will gain from it. Yet, I talk to farmers who do want to get rid of the Wheat Board who have admitted to me that thousands of farms will close because there are farmers who are past the average age of 50 who will not be able to withstand the transition.

As a consequence, those small farms will close. Small economies in rural areas of the western provinces will suffer dramatically. Even they admitted to it. Lo and behold, those very same comments were made in *The Economist*.

I want to know why do you place the needs of a few above the needs and preferences of the many when 62% voted in favour of keeping this board?

•(1750)

The Deputy Speaker: Before I recognize the hon. member, I would like to remind all members, especially in controversial debates, to direct their comments through the Chair.

The hon. member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, the member has it so wrong that it is unbelievable. Two years down the road ask farmers what they think of what has happened when they get the freedom to market. The member is right in one regard that there are some farmers who are concerned about losing what they see as protection from the Wheat Board monopoly. But many of them actually believe what we are doing is taking the Wheat Board away entirely which we are not doing. All we are doing is removing the monopoly. The board will still be there. If they want to market through the board, there is no real transition period for them. That is not a problem at all.

If I were allowed to make a wager, two or three years down the road farmers who are concerned about this change would say they were worried about it, but it has been a really good thing and they are glad that someone had the guts to finally do it.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor and allowing me to participate in this debate. This morning, when I was preparing this brief speech, I began with a formal sort of phrase such as "Thank you, it is a pleasure to be taking part in this debate." When I reread it, it was clear to me that there was a problem because I am not pleased to be taking part in this debate. I am interested in taking part in it, but it brings me no happiness.

I have discovered something else as I write my speeches. All of my colleagues have discovered it, and they have more experience than I. I have begun hearing voices. We hear a lot of voices in the House, and I have a feeling they stick with us when we are sitting in front of a computer. I figured that some people would ask me why a member from the east, a city boy, a new member of Parliament to boot, is talking about a topic that concerns western Canada. They might also wonder what I know about farmers in the west. I admit that I am not sure when we stop being new members; that is something I have yet to learn here on the Hill. Of course, I agree that there are certain subtleties that I do not grasp. But the fact remains that in Quebec, we know about workers' groups and, what is more, we respect them.

For example, we need only think of the creation, development and growth of co-operative movements, such as the Mouvement des caisses populaires Desjardins, which enabled a number of workers in many different sectors to be able to grow together without leaving anyone behind. There are also agricultural co-operatives. We have some co-operative agricultural movements back home in Quebec. I could talk about investment funds like the FTQ, which was created by workers who invest in businesses. That is another co-operative movement that is an extraordinary jewel in Quebec and that, as I was saying earlier, attempts to give the workers it represents—and for whom it works—the means to grow without leaving the smallest ones behind.

I can say that for Quebecers, myself included, being sensitive to the cause of workers in every sector, including agriculture, is probably part of our genes. We are listening sympathetically and we care about the legitimate concerns of the western farmers.

In the few hours and days that I have been listening to the debate on Bill C-18, it has become increasingly clear that this is essentially an ideological debate, in which the sacrosanct ideology of free enterprise is being pitted against the willingness of workers to organize themselves and grow together. It has also become clear that it is important to try to clear up some rather off-putting myths that some people have been spreading here on the Hill for months.

Private Members' Business

Here is one. Since the debate began on Bill C-18, I keep hearing people talk about western farmers as though they were one homogeneous group. I think the reality is quite different. Now is the time to put our democratic rules into practice, the very rules that epitomize the society in which we live. Since September of this year, I have been living in a strange world, one where the basic democratic rules that I taught for such a long time seem to have been rewritten. I used to teach my students that the free and democratic expression of a vote was, in most cases, 50% of the votes plus one, except in some cases of associations or constitutions that require two-thirds of all votes. However, 50% plus one, I think, was a clear enough agreement for everyone. However, since May 2011, my colleagues across the floor have been trying to convince me that 39% of the votes is a strong mandate.

•(1755)

I have heard it enough times that it has started to stick. I am not saying that I agree, but I hear it a lot. I still have a hard time with this concept, but I do hear it.

In reading the results of the referendum of western farmers, I thought to myself that if 39% is considered a strong mandate, then how would we describe 62%? The word that came to mind was "colossal". It seems as though western farmers, although they were probably not unanimous, gave a colossal mandate to their association to do everything possible to protect and safeguard the Canadian Wheat Board. Furthermore, when an institution belongs to the farmers, is managed by the farmers and is funded by the farmers, I seem to me that the decision should, at the end of the day, be theirs to make.

When I agreed to become a member of Parliament on May 2, I knew that part of my job would be to help draft, introduce and vote on legislation that would guide our way of life, but little did I know that, as legislators in this House, we could somehow be exempt from the law when we felt like it.

That is what I understand from the attitude of the government which, according to the act, has an obligation to consult by referendum or plebiscite but has decided to try to get around this obligation and is refusing to recognize the very referendum conducted by farmers. Does this mean I have to go back and teach my students something even worse? The act requires a referendum for any major change. Does that mean that dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board does not constitute a significant change in its development?

A certain number of factors also lead me to believe that we could consider a mixed model under which the majority would keep the Canadian Wheat Board while those who are not interested could suggest another model. That is what the government also seems to be proposing in its bill. I am reluctant for one simple reason: although the model is interesting theoretically and looks good on paper, in reality, it does not work. In fact, without the Canadian Wheat Board, farmers will be in competition with each other rather than working together as a single major player that is able to compete with the large, multinational agribusinesses of the world.

The smallest farmers will struggle to save their family businesses, to the advantage of the largest producers who will have the means to buy them up. Clearly, we would be making the economy of many

agricultural regions in western Canada more fragile. Dramatic drops in price and loss of revenue would be unavoidable since the rule of the competition would now be every man for himself. In this regard, it seems to me that Australia's experience should serve as a warning and that we could learn from their experience.

In addition, have we truly considered the social consequences of shutting down the Wheat Board? Of course, it is not just about money, but the Wheat Board does allow for marketing in 70 countries. I would like the government to name me one farmer who could do that without selling his grain to a large multinational company.

The Wheat Board puts \$4 billion to \$7 billion back into farmers' pockets each year and it has many advantages.

In closing, I would like to ask a very quick question. Why does the government not want to hear western farmers' clear and democratic statement?

•(1800)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member will have five minutes for questions and comments the next time this bill is called for debate.

It being 6 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

IMPORTATION OF INTOXICATING LIQUORS ACT

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC) moved that Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (interprovincial importation of wine for personal use), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is with a tremendous amount of pleasure that I rise in the House today to kick off the first hour of debate at second reading of Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (interprovincial importation of wine for personal use).

I would first like to recognize the work of my colleague from Kelowna—Lake Country. Members will know he has done a great deal to move this important issue forward and to help an important Canadian industry grow and prosper.

I would like to share with all members of the House why I believe this bill is important.

Twenty years ago in the province of British Columbia there were roughly 15 wineries. Today the number is closer to 200 growing close to 10,000 acres of grapes, with a crop yield in excess of \$40 million annually. More importantly, this has created an industry that provides thousands of jobs, even spinoff industries, such as, barrel making, stainless steel tanks and fabrication, laboratories, bottle and label making, marketing, and agri-tourism.

Private Members' Business

The economic benefits of the wine industry are far reaching. It is a clean industry that does not pollute our skies or rivers and is something at which many families can prosper, including first nation communities. That is correct. In the riding of British Columbia Southern Interior is Canada's first aboriginal owned winery. It makes great wines. In my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla, much like the ridings of Kelowna—Lake Country and British Columbia Southern Interior, we know first-hand the significant value and economic benefits of the wine industry.

Here is something very exciting. Nova Scotia is an emerging wine region. In fact, I have learned that Nova Scotia has discovered a great varietal called the l'Acadie grape which is well suited to the local climate and produces great wine. Today, as an emerging wine region, there are roughly 15 wineries in Nova Scotia, exactly where British Columbia was 20 years ago. Let us not forget that today B.C. has close to 200 wineries. That is great growth and prosperity for the B.C. wine industry and holds great potential for the province of Nova Scotia.

It does not end there. I have also learned that in the province of Quebec there are now five different wine regions and within those five regions are some 50 Quebec wineries that also produce some great wine. In Ontario the number grows to close to 140 wineries with roughly 16,000 acres planted in grapes. In fact, there is now a winery in every province of this great country. That is why we must not overlook the importance of supporting the Canadian wine industry, but there is a challenge.

Some 83 years ago during the prohibition era, a law was passed to make it illegal for everyday citizens to transport or ship wine across provincial borders. It is, for all intents and purposes, an interprovincial trade barrier, meaning that a winery in Quebec cannot legally send a bottle of wine to a customer in Alberta. Here is where it gets more redundant. That same Quebec winery that cannot legally send a bottle of wine to Alberta can send that exact same bottle of wine to Texas. Many small Canadian wineries can access markets outside our borders more easily than they can inside our own great country.

Canadians have proven that they can produce some of the best wine in the world and yet they cannot sell the wine directly to consumers in other Canadian provinces. We, as members of Parliament, have an opportunity to work together to change that by supporting Bill C-311.

Imagine if cars built in Ontario could not be sold in British Columbia. What if prized Nova Scotia lobster could not be sent directly to all households across Canada? This is the reality for many of the small Canadian wine producers. Those in the wine industry have been battling this unjust prohibition era legislation for many years, but collectively they have been the underdog. For a small family winery, as the vast majority of them are, without sufficient volume and financial resources, selling through large-scale provincial liquor distribution is very costly. That is why this prohibition era legislation is particularly harmful, because it restricts any marketplace alternative.

• (1805)

I am not a wine drinker, but I do appreciate that all across Canada from coast to coast we have families who work very hard to grow

grapes. They invest their life savings into their vineyards and turn those grapes into a value-added commodity that helps drive our regional economies and puts people to work. However, an 83-year-old prohibition law essentially denies these same Canadian wine producers the ability to access the Canadian marketplace like every other Canadian producer can.

I will talk about how the bill hopes to rectify this situation, but first I will provide some background for the benefit of members.

The Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act controls the importation of intoxicating liquors into Canada and between provinces. Ultimately, the Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act, typically referred to as the IILA. At the border, this is administered by the Canada Border Services Agency. However, neither the CRA nor the CBSA administers or enforces the IILA in respect of interprovincial transactions.

Currently, the IILA dictates that all imports of wine from one province into another must be made solely by the provincial liquor board or a private corporation designated by that province. This prevents wine to be brought in or to be shipped by an individual from one province to another. This is why Canada Post and other shipping companies will not allow a citizen or a winery to directly send wine across a provincial territory. It is also why it is illegal for citizens to transport wine in person across provincial borders. That means if someone travels to Gatineau and purchases wine, the moment it is brought back to Ottawa, the person has broken a federal law according to the IILA.

Bill C-311 would amend the IILA to allow Canadians to purchase wine while visiting another province and then bring that wine back home into their own province. Bill C-311 would also amend the IILA to allow for domestic wineries to market and sell their products directly to consumers from other regions of the country.

To be clear, the purpose of the exemption is solely for personal use and not for commercial purposes. The personal exemption quantity limit is established individually by each province in question. To date, both Alberta and Ontario have developed a personal exemption policy for a provincial exemption definition. Other provinces have declined to develop a personal exemption on account of the IILA making the personal importation of wine illegal. That is why it is so important that we take action to create this personal exemption.

I would like to take a moment to share with the House that this proposal has generated a great deal of support from across Canada. In fact, even today I received a letter from Federal Express Canada in support of this bill. The Canadian Vintners Association and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce are in support of a personal exemption for the delivery of wine directly to consumers from outside their home province.

Private Members' Business

When reading the newspapers recently, I was pleased to learn that the Liberal finance and revenue critic, the member for Kings—Hants, supports the idea of reforming the IILA. The leader of the B.C. NDP agrees and last week stated that the B.C. NDP is advocating for an industry that employs a lot of people, is of huge value and is a cultural symbol in the Okanagan and a lot of other regions as well. I would also note that our NDP colleague, the member for British Columbia Southern Interior, has also made it clear to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food via correspondence that he would like to see changes to the IILA on behalf of his constituents.

Before I close I would like to share with the House the reality of a small family-run winery in my riding.

A typical 15-acre vineyard can yield roughly 40 tonnes of grapes per year. Those 40 tonnes of grapes, all going well, would then produce just 2,500 cases of wine. To sell through the large-scale liquor distribution system is very costly for a small winery. In my province, a small family winery is potentially looking at costs of 60% to sell through the liquor distribution branch, LDB, bureaucracy. That means of the 2,500 cases of wine, the first 1,500 cases are sacrificed solely to pay for the overhead of selling through a government corporate structure. That leaves just 1,000 cases of wine for a small family winery to try to pay the bills, provide jobs, pay taxes and make a living.

The reality for small wineries is that they cannot afford those kinds of costs. That is why opening up the Canadian marketplace is of such critical importance to the wine industry.

•(1810)

This week a small winery owner told me that this IILA exemption could increase his business by a potential 10%. That means more capital would be available for him to invest into expanding his winery. When I asked the winery owner what he would do with that added revenue, he was very quick to respond. He needs to build another 2,500 square foot building. That new building would house some new stainless steel fermentation tanks that would also need to be purchased. That creates jobs and supports our economy.

I would like to thank my colleagues for listening to my comments today. I am hopeful they will join me in supporting this bill and the Canadian wine industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech.

I have a question for him about Bill C-311. Currently, certain governments that do not use an exemption collect revenue on wine imported from other provinces. I would like my colleague to give me some reassurance.

[*English*]

Could the member explain to me if this bill would prevent a provincial government from collecting revenue from a wine imported by an individual from another province? Basically, would the province that wishes to continue to get revenue from those be allowed to do that?

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, there is no question that Bill C-311, if passed, would result in increased wine sales. Currently all of Canada's major wine-producing regions have the HST that is applicable on the sale of wine, regardless of where that wine is sold across Canada. Increased sales would mean more HST revenue both to the federal and respective provincial governments. There is also HST on shipping so, again, we would see a net taxation gain for many of the provinces that have these wineries.

•(1815)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I rise with pleasure to assure the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla of the complete support of the Green Party caucus for this long overdue reform. In Saanich—Gulf Islands, we also have numerous wineries. I could name them but it would seem to be pandering to my constituents who run the Muse Winery, the Garry Oaks Winery, the Church & State winery, Salt Spring Vineyards, and I could go on.

I commend the member for bringing this bill forward. I will do everything in my power to help it pass. I hope all members in this House will ensure this legislation passes.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's support.

Many of the winery owners I have spoken to have suggested a sales volume increase in their business of at least 5% and close to 10% due to this change. In the case of every winery owner I have spoken with, increased revenues will be directly and immediately reinvested into the local economy, something I am sure the member's riding would be supportive of due to her riding's involvement in the industry.

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. friend for righting an age-old wrong and getting rid of an old anachronism that does not really apply in our time.

In 1988 we saw the opposition parties, both the Liberals and the NDP, oppose the Canada-U.S. free trade agreement. We have seen them oppose a number of free trade agreements. They are never supportive of releasing the barriers to trade and creating more opportunities for business.

Has it not been proven that once Canadians are allowed to compete on the world stage, we can prosper? The member's bill is a great example of allowing Canadians to act freely on the world stage.

Mr. Dan Albas: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that Canada is a trading nation and we benefit from trade. One of the reasons we will hopefully see all-party support for this bill is the fact that public opinion is far ahead of us. This is simply a catch-up to right a policy that is no longer held in public opinion as being a good one. We could allow those small family wineries to prosper and take control of their own destiny. I think that is something all members of this House want to see. We want to see jobs and growth in our ridings.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I support this legislation wholeheartedly and intend to be one of the seconders of the legislation.

Private Members' Business

In my riding of Kings—Hants, we have seen tremendous growth in the wine industry. In fact, on our property we raise L'Acadie grapes ourselves. Those L'Acadie grapes resulted from research at the Kentville research station.

Does the member agree that the government must invest in regional local research in these research stations across Canada and that local research is fundamental to growing—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla has 20 seconds to respond.

Mr. Dan Albas: I will be as quick as I can, Madam Speaker.

In my own riding we have the Pacific agri-research station. The Ambrosia apple came from that, so yes, I absolutely believe that we have a role to play in research and innovation. It helps our farmers to stay competitive internationally and provides jobs in the economy of the future, not just in traditional industries.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to say that I am in favour of sending this bill to be studied in committee. The question is not so much about governments losing revenue as it is about helping small business and small producers. My colleague was right to say that many provinces, Quebec included, have small wineries, and this bill would allow them to increase production as well as trade between provinces.

In this case, it should be made clear that the bill is specifically about individuals. It says:

...the importation of wine from a province by an individual, if the individual brings the wine or causes it to be brought into another province, in quantities and as permitted by the laws of the latter province, for his or her personal consumption, and not for resale or other commercial use.

It is important to examine this in committee in order to understand the potential repercussions of this bill in terms of loss of revenues for a government. Certain points need to be studied. For instance, since the Province of Quebec does not allow individuals to import wine and there is no exemption for this, that province could suffer losses. This risk exists for other provinces, too. On the other hand, this bill would stimulate the economy, which is good. It would help small businesses, especially at a time when economic uncertainty is at our door. This bill could really be beneficial for small businesses that really need help right now.

Thus, it is important to look at all aspects affected by this bill. I know many people support it, like my colleague. At first glance, we can see the benefits this bill could have in terms of job creation and assistance to small wine producers.

However, I would like to add that, at this stage, it is difficult to really assess its impact. One study said:

•(1820)

[*English*]

It is difficult to determine the impact of Bill C-311 on stakeholders such as wine producers and provincial and territorial governments, in part due to differences among the provincial and territorial liquor-related statutes and exemptions contained in those statutes.

In addition, prohibitions regarding the interprovincial importation of wine are not enforced consistently in respect of consumers and wine producers. Wine producers are unable to ship orders directly to individuals across provincial borders. However, individuals who transport wine from one province to another on their person are rarely charged with an offence.

[*Translation*]

That is from a report submitted as part of the prebudget consultations for budget 2011.

[*English*]

The activity that would appear to be most affected by the bill would be the direct shipment of wine to individuals across provincial borders.

Wine producers would benefit. The beneficial effect of the bill would likely be an expanded market for Canadian wineries, resulting in higher sales, more jobs and an increased investment in winery equipment and infrastructure. The provinces would thereby benefit from additional income tax revenues.

[*Translation*]

There are obviously benefits in this regard. The bill would allow more production and more trade between the provinces. Wine lovers, especially individuals, would be able to go to another province and bring back wine to their province without necessarily breaking the law. However, what is important once again is to look at the limits imposed by the provinces. The report also states:

[*English*]

However, any increase in wine demand could be limited by any personal exemption provided by the provinces or territories, which for most is no more than 1.5 litres of wine.

[*Translation*]

There already are some restrictions and exemptions. For example, in Ontario, there is a nine-litre exemption. Thus, someone who buys wine outside the province can bring back up to nine litres.

•(1825)

[*English*]

For provinces and territories that would have a personal consumption exemption, the effect of Bill C-311 on provincial revenues could be zero, assuming that individuals would not exceed the amount allowed in the exemption. If individuals order amounts that exceed the personal consumption exemption, then provincial liquor authorities would decide how to impose the exemption.

For provinces that do not have exemptions, the primary impact of the bill could be a decrease in provincial revenues in the event that individuals who would normally order wine from other provinces through their provincial liquor board, commission or corporation would perhaps instead order directly from the winery.

[*Translation*]

Some of the repercussions must be analyzed. Let us take a look at what happened in the United States.

Private Members' Business

[*English*]

A study examining interstate wine shipments found that when a similar prohibition on interstate alcohol importation was lifted in the United States in 2005, interstate sales of wine increased by 11.5% between 2005 and 2008. However, wine sales that did not have tax deducted by either the shipping state or the receiving state, whether due to wine producers not charging state taxes consistently or due to tax evasion by consumers, increased by 9.6% over the period.

These data suggest that a loss of tax revenue might occur with increased accessibility to direct wine shipment in Canada. However, other sources have argued that wine sales directly to individuals in Canada represent an estimated 1% of the Vintners Quality Alliance 100% Canadian wine sales. Thus the bill's impact on liquor board, commission or corporate revenues could be limited.

That comes from the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance pre-budget consultation in 2011.

The issue here is to really look at what the impacts are and what the benefit will be, obviously for the wine producers but also for all the other producers or makers who are related to wine as well. My colleague did mention that there are a lot of people involved in that industry, so it could be beneficial.

I think Canadians will strongly benefit from a greater selection of wine, especially from the smaller wineries across Canada. We need to really look at the options and what this will bring to the economy.

In terms of analyzing, as I mentioned before, it is really difficult for us to know exactly how loss will occur due to the loss of revenue for provincial governments. We should sit down and look at it. That is why it is important for the Standing Committee on Finance to look at all the options and all the benefits that would bring.

There are some issues with the bill, but when we look at the benefits, especially right now in terms of the economy, helping our wineries, especially the small wineries, could be very beneficial. It is something we have to look at.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to speak to Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (interprovincial importation of wine for personal use). As the law stands today, it is illegal to purchase wine from a winery in one province and then bring it home.

In Canada a consumer cannot purchase a bottle of wine in one province and then transport it across a provincial border. One cannot purchase wine online or have it sent by mail if the wine is coming from a different province. I use these examples because simply laying out the facts as the law stands now, it seems difficult for people to believe we have a law in place that is this nonsensical and anachronistic.

The reality is it is easier today for a consumer to import wine from another country than to import wine from another province. There are more trade barriers between New Brunswick and Nova Scotia than there are between Canada and Chile, as an example. This ridiculous situation needs to be addressed and this legislation is a big help in addressing it.

As an example, if people from New Brunswick make the very short trip to visit a winery in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia, they cannot even bring wine home with them. It is against the law. There are both federal and provincial laws that make this activity illegal. Most of these rules date back to the prohibition era. They are outdated and they needlessly cost Canadian jobs. We need to get rid of them.

That is why I am proud not only to support but also to second Bill C-311. The bill would get rid of the federal rule against importing wine from one province to another as long as that wine would be for personal use and not for commercial purposes. It would amend Canada's Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act to create an exception for personal use. I would argue that we ought to go further to include the restaurant industry and commercial use as well. That is a discussion for another day and also engagement with provincial governments.

The legislation would not get rid of the problem entirely. Most provinces will still not allow wine to be imported from another province, but Bill C-311 sends the right signal and provides some federal leadership by removing the federal obstacle. That is a step in the right direction.

Thankfully, the Province of Ontario is already moving in that direction on the provincial side. This past summer the LCBO changed its rules to allow individuals to bring with them up to nine litres of wine from another province. It makes me wonder why they would choose nine litres when wine comes in cases, of course. However, sometimes the bureaucracy does things that we cannot understand. It is like buying cars that never seem to take whole containers of antifreeze. Anyway, that is another discussion.

In any case, it is a step in the right direction. I commend the Ontario government for taking that step. We need every province to make these kinds of changes.

The member for York Centre referred to the Liberal Party's aversion to free trade. In fact, the Liberal Party, with the exception of one election in 1988, has always been the party of freer trade. In fact, if we look from an economic perspective, liberalized trade is something that is key to the Liberal Party and core to our beliefs on the economy.

In order to keep Canada's wine industry, including our wineries in Nova Scotia competitive, it is essential that we break down these barriers on the federal side and on the provincial side. In terms of Nova Scotia's wine industry, when I was first elected 14 years ago, there was one winery operating in my riding of Kings—Hants. As of 2010, there are now 17 farm wineries and 30 grape growers operating vineyards. It is a \$10 million a year industry.

Private Members' Business

The hon. member referred to the fact that today the Annapolis Valley in Nova Scotia is perhaps where the B.C. industry in the Okanagan Valley was 20 years ago. That is quite right. It would be helpful for us to look at what lessons we can learn from what has occurred in the Okanagan Valley and in the Niagara region. We should also look at the genesis of the wine industry in the Napa Valley, the Sonoma Valley and central coast. We should be looking at these and determining best practice on a local level.

•(1830)

In any case, the success of these wineries in my riding has created huge spinoffs for restaurants and tourism, and the whole foodie-type tourism which is growing. It is a remarkably valuable resource and an enhancement to the quality of life for people who live in the Annapolis Valley of Nova Scotia.

In my riding of Kings—Hants we can now boast nine wineries: L'Acadie Vineyards in Gaspereau, operated by Bruce Ewert; Avondale Sky Winery in Newport Landing, operated by Ben Swetnam; Benjamin Bridge Vineyards in Gaspereau, operated by Gerry McConnell and his family; Blomidon Estate Winery in Canning, managed by Greg Benjamin; Domaine De Grand Pré in Grand Pré, managed by Hanspeter Stutz, winemaker Jurg Stutz; Gaspereau Vineyards in Gaspereau, managed by Dan Burns, winemaker, Gina Haverstock; Luckett Vineyards in Wolfville, operated by that great Nova Scotian entrepreneur Pete Luckett; Muir Murray Estate Winery outside of Wolfville, operated by Dr. Jonathan Murray; and Sainte-Famille Wines in Falmouth, operated by Suzanne Corkum.

In terms of recognition, people are taking notice of the wines in Nova Scotia. Many of these wineries are now winning awards. As an example, at last year's Canadian Wine Awards, Bruce Ewert of L'Acadie Vineyards received a gold medal for his 2007 Prestige Brut. Nova Scotia is excited to host this year's awards in November 2011.

A recent *Globe and Mail* article on Benjamin Bridge Brut Reserve was titled, "Surprise! One of Canada's best wines is from Nova Scotia".

It said:

I'll say it straight. One of the best Canadian wines I've tasted comes from Nova Scotia. I'm only surprised that it didn't come from the Champagne region of France. It's called Benjamin Bridge Brut Reserve...

The sparkling wine industry is evolving successfully in Nova Scotia as well as the ice wine industry. The success is also enhancing our orchard industry and value-added industry related to the orchards and the emerging cider industry. There are a lot of spinoffs.

This is probably a bad sign for any industry, when politicians start to enter it, but a couple of years ago we planted a vineyard on our property on the shores of the Minas Basin. We have a wonderful south-facing slope on the shores of the Minas Basin. We planted L'Acadie vines and we are intending on expanding that this year. In my line of work, it is always good to have a backup plan.

The wineries in our region are drawing tourists from throughout the country and around the world. Tourists are touring the wineries, eating at our restaurants, staying at the inns, the bed and breakfasts, and hotels, supporting the local economy.

What is really crazy is that in many cases people from other parts of Canada, after sampling the excellent local wines, cannot buy a case to take it home with them. That is nuts.

I remember in the 1990s, I lived in New York and travelled throughout the U.S. doing business. I remember spending a weekend in Napa Valley. We bought cases of wine and had them shipped back to us in New York. It was great. That is the way it should be. It is not only good for the local economy, but it is civilized.

The idea that we cannot transport wine across a provincial border is so nonsensical and damaging to the development and the evolution of businesses, wineries and restaurants. It makes no sense whatsoever.

In terms of the future growth of Nova Scotia wine, more and more Nova Scotians are discovering and supporting local wineries. In fact, last year the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission sold \$109 million of worth of wine. Of that, almost 6% of that was local wine from Nova Scotia.

Even in terms of our own province, it is growing. The key, the way to grow our markets, is to actually expand so that we can sell wine across Canada.

Nova Scotia has a population of less than a million people, so our market is too small to sustain the kind of growth that we are able to achieve in our industry. We need to remove these needless interprovincial trade barriers and open up our markets so that local businesses can create jobs and grow the economy.

I know I am delving into areas of provincial jurisdiction which is always a mistake for a federal politician, but nevertheless.

•(1835)

I am a citizen of Nova Scotia. I did not relinquish my citizenship to become a federal politician. As such, I do have opinions and one of those opinions is that neither the provincial liquor commission in Nova Scotia nor the provincial government need be in the liquor business to begin with. Last year the liquor commission made \$230 million and was run by bureaucrats. Imagine how much it would be worth if it were run by retailers who understood the markets. We could privatize that and take \$3 billion or \$4 billion off the provincial debt.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Madam Speaker, I agree with much of what is being said today, particularly by the sponsor of the bill, the member for Okanagan—Coquihalla. He is a well informed advocate on behalf of the wine producers of his region as is the member for Kelowna—Lake Country, who was the sponsor of this legislation in the last Parliament.

I am supporting this bill in part because of what it would do for the wine industry and also because of what it potentially would do as a model for all of our value-added agricultural products, for which wine is the template model.

Private Members' Business

We have an agricultural industry which ultimately goes in one of two directions. It can either produce on a mass scale some kind of modified product, and there is nothing wrong with doing that and doing it effectively, but that naturally assumes economies of scale and the end of the family-operated farm or agricultural producer, or it can produce a value-added quality product which has a clear line of sight between the producer and the consumer, so that the consumer can identify that he or she really likes a certain product and then chooses to seek out that product either through a retailer or through direct purchase from the producer.

That is what we are trying to cause to happen with this legislation, to allow individuals to visit a winery in whatever province it happens to be, find a product they like, and arrange to have it shipped back to them. This is something which I have done myself within my own province.

A few years back my wife and I visited the Niagara Peninsula and arranged to have a couple of bottles of wine every month sent from Andrew Peller Estates to our house in Lanark County. That is possible because they are both in the same province. If there were an intervening provincial boundary, we would be out of luck and the winery would be out of luck, and that potential relationship would be severed. Again, we are not commodity consumers of wine my wife and I. We are not volume consumers, but we are willing to spend more to get a better product to make our evenings and meals more enjoyable.

I think that reflects many consumers of wine and of other products that are of a similar nature, such as cider, craft root beer, various maple products, various types of cheese, and so on. All of these can follow potentially the model that is presented by wine, and which if we think about it, is an agricultural product. It is nothing more than grape juice that has been fermented a certain way. The grapes are certainly fermented a certain way, preserved a certain way either in oak barrels or in bottles, and then sent off to the consumer. As a result of the magic that happens in between, it becomes a potentially valuable product and it allows the creation of a robust, rural economy.

Many links have already been pointed out. Agri-tourism results from a prosperous wine growing region. I am an enthusiastic agri-tourist myself, and particularly the various wine trails. I am just going to give a small and partial list of some of the wine trails I have been on to make the point because they are models of what can happen when producers can establish that link with consumers and start shipping products to those who like what they taste.

I have been on the wine trail and have visited vineyards in, among other places, California, New York State, and Massachusetts of all places. I was on a tour in New Zealand along with several other MPs and we went to some of the wineries there. I have also been to five different Australian states, every Australian state except Queensland, which is too warm to grow a decent wine. I could go on.

I have visited wineries in a number of provinces, but I have never been able to legally import that wine. I was on the wine trail in the Saint-Jean region of Quebec. I was on the wine trail from Nova Scotia back to Ontario. I inadvertently, and unknowingly illegally, brought back some Quebec wine. I did not know there was Quebec wine until I went to language training in Saint-Jean and discovered

SAQ, bought a bunch of it, brought it back, again breaking the law unknowingly. I am no longer in contravention of the law because the wine is now gone. That should not have happened.

• (1840)

Had I actually known that I was doing this and said that I liked this stuff and wanted to buy some more, they would have told me I could not do that. That is a problem that should be corrected. One of the reasons why it should be corrected and why this rule change is beneficial in Canada in a way that would not conflict with jurisdictions is that our wine industry is not based on the kind of mass production in some other jurisdictions. In parts of South America such as Chile, Argentina or in Spain there are entire landscapes which have rows and rows as far as the eye can see of grapevines producing massive quantities of what is largely a commodity product.

Canada's wine production is based on microproduction, micro-climates, and small areas. In Quebec, for example, the wine areas were located and identified largely by Swiss investors who were familiar with growing on south-facing hillsides in their own country and identified using satellite images of soil temperature, areas that would successfully have microclimates. When there is a micro-climate in a small area to work with, there has to be a certain type of production which is all about quality rather than quantity.

That means it is linked into agri-tourism, visiting people from other provinces, people who are going to establish a taste for the wine which is already a premium product and arrange to ship it back. That is the kind of market that naturally will benefit from a widespread market, a market that is thin in terms of the number of people in any given part of the country who like the product, but broad in terms of the coverage.

Speaking of another illegal wine drinking experience I had at one point, some friends went to Nova Scotia, brought back sparkling wine my colleague talked about a minute ago from Jost. We enjoyed it together in Ontario illegally and unknowingly. I could not go to the Jost website to order some for my personal consumption. I could visit Nova Scotia, but realistically developing a market through the Internet is not an option that is available to me as it would be, ironically, if I were returning home from Nova Scotia to my home in the State of Maine. That definitely is a particular aspect that needs to be emphasized.

We are trying to get rid for the sake of prosperity of various trade barriers. On the international level we are doing a better and better job as a country. We established the North American Free Trade Agreement. We have negotiated trade agreements with countries as small and remote as Colombia and Jordan, and with various European countries. We are now working on removing trade barriers with the EU as a whole, also India. There are a lot of exciting things going on and some of the provinces, to their credit, are trying to get rid of their own trade barriers. British Columbia and Alberta negotiated a trade agreement which was called TILMA and I think Saskatchewan has joined in, and that is good.

Private Members' Business

This, however, through an artifact of history, is a federally created trade barrier. This is a step we as federal politicians, federal statesmen let us say, can take to get rid of an unnecessary impediment to the prosperity of our rural areas, to the cultural well-being of our consumers, and to the general betterment of the kind of rural areas that people like me represent.

In my riding we have two wineries at this point. Again, most of the riding is far too cold, but on the north shore of Lake Ontario in Lennox Addington County there is an area where it is possible to grow wine in small quantities, but it is very good wine. Two wineries, Bergeron and 33 Vines, are in many respects typical of the kinds of vineyards that are across the country in many provinces that deserve to have the ability to sell across provincial lines to the willing and enthusiastic customers who are out there hoping to sample their excellent product.

• (1845)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am very happy to rise to speak in favour of Bill C-311, An Act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (interprovincial importation of wine for personal use), an act from 1928.

As a bit of a digression, there was a time in 1928 when these kinds of prohibitions created some opportunities in the area in which I live. The ship named *Malahat* was built in Victoria in 1917. It was a five-masted schooner nearly 80 metres long, which carried 60,000 cases of rum down to California. It would sit in international waters and then have small boats run through the American prohibition. We are talking about a law that dates from an era that is obviously a long time ago and a very different situation, a law which no longer serves a useful purpose and in fact inhibits the development of many small wineries around the country.

On Vancouver Island there are now 26 wineries operating. In order for those wineries to operate, they buy lots of things locally. They buy all of their agricultural equipment, fertilizers and marketing goods and they employ people to build websites. It is a very important link to a lot of small businesses in my riding in particular and around Vancouver Island.

It is also very important, as many have mentioned, to the tourism industry. People who come to visit my riding could start at Starling Lane Winery on West Saanich Road, cross over to Salt Spring Island, as my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands said, cross back to Cherry Point Vineyards in Cobble Hill, Yellowpoint Vineyard in Ladysmith, Blue Grouse Vineyards & Winery in Duncan and come to the largest winery on Vancouver Island, Averill Creek Vineyards in Duncan. All of these are family-owned enterprises and small businesses.

As many have already mentioned, the peculiar thing is if people from British Columbia have a designated driver and sample the wines at each of the vineyards, they can take a case with them or order one shipped to their homes. However, people from Alberta or Quebec cannot have wine shipped to them or take it with them as they drive across the country. This is completely non-productive, which is the nicest word I can think of to use, for economic growth and development in all of these regions, particularly for small businesses that face the challenge of high costs these days.

One thing that is particularly difficult for wineries on Vancouver Island and in the Okanagan are the increasing land costs. When a small winery is established, wants to expand and buy more land, it is very difficult, so it needs to make use of whatever revenue sources it can to develop its business further. If wineries were able to run online businesses and ship across the country, it would be important revenue generation, which would add very little in terms of costs to their operations. It might be the difference between wineries being able to survive as a family-supporting business and not being able to survive in the future. The damage the existence of this law has done is quite serious for small businesses and may become more serious as time goes on.

In contrast to the hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla who is not a wine drinker, I will join the others who have confessed to being wine drinkers. My partner and I like to go on wine tours in the Okanagan. We have done it on several occasions, taking turns being the designated driver each day and stuffing the car full of bottles when we drive home. However, if we lived in Alberta, we could not stuff the car full of bottles.

On our last tour, some people I know who run a winery, one of my favourites, Road 13 in Oliver, asked me if they could ship me a case. I replied that as a newly-elected MP I would love to have a case shipped to me so I could entertain members with fine B.C. wine. They said that I could not do that. They said that they could not sell it to me, I could not advertise for them or promote the industry because of the existing very archaic law.

We drove across the country this summer through the Okanagan. If we had managed to stuff wine under the seats of our car, or put a few in the back seat next to the dogs and delivered it here, I would be unable to invite members for a drink later for two reasons: first, there might not be any left; and second, I would not have done that because it would be illegal for me to do so.

• (1850)

I make light of this because it is an absurd situation we are in, where small businesses that are doing very well in developing very high quality wines cannot market those to other Canadians in other provinces.

I look forward to this going to committee. I look forward to the debate on it. I look forward to the day when I can invite members around to my office to sample some of the great wines from British Columbia, but that will not be tonight.

• (1855)

Mr. Peter Braid (Kitchener—Waterloo, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is with a great deal of pleasure that I rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-311, an act to amend the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act (interprovincial importation of wine for personal use).

Adjournment Proceedings

I will begin by recognizing the work of my colleague from Kelowna—Lake Country on this file and congratulate him on his very important work. Members will know he has done a great deal to move this file forward and I am sure we will continue to work together to address this issue in order to help Canadians improve their ability to have greater control over the wine they choose and help an important Canadian industry to grow and prosper.

As background, for the benefit of all members, the Importation of Intoxicating Liquors Act, or the IILA, controls the importation of intoxicating liquors into Canada and between provinces, as we have been discussing. The Canada Revenue Agency is responsible for the IILA, as it interacts with the Excise Act and the Excise Act 2001. Canada Border Services Agency administers the IILA at the border. However, neither agency administers or enforces the IILA in respect of interprovincial transactions.

Since 1928, the act has legally restricted the movement of wine across provincial borders. While this may have responded to the needs of the day, Canada did not even have a wine industry at the time. However, today fantastic wineries can be found in provinces from coast to coast. Vineyards are a fast growing and increasingly important part of our agricultural sector and they could be growing even faster.

Many of Canada's innovative vintners have earned worldwide recognition for their outstanding products. Indeed, Canadian wines are frequently the recipients of international prizes. These award-winning wines are in demand around the world.

Despite this progress and success, Canadian wineries find themselves in contravention of federal law if they respond to requests for their products from consumers in neighbouring provinces. That is because the IILA makes it a crime for consumers to purchase wine directly from vintners beyond their provincial borders.

Not only does the legislation penalize consumers by limiting choice and their access to Canadian wine products, it also hurts the culinary and wine tourism industry, an important sector of our economy in my home province of Ontario and in beautiful British Columbia due to the increasingly popular tourist wine regions in these areas. Wine tasting tours in areas like the Niagara region of Ontario and the Okanagan or Fraser Valley in the B.C. Interior are tremendously popular with domestic tourists and visitors from around the globe.

More important, this outdated aspect of the legislation limits wineries' sales of their products across Canada. This is particularly the case for small and medium-sized wineries that are just getting their business off the ground. Many wineries complain that the process of applying to provincial liquor boards to have their products put on the store shelves can be lengthy and costly. The last thing these vintners need is 83-year-old legislation that hinders job creation and stifles economic growth.

• (1900)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. member will have approximately four minutes when the bill returns on the agenda.

[Translation]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

HEALTH

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am here to discuss a question I asked the Minister of Health on September 30 when the good news was received throughout Canada that the Supreme Court of Canada had ruled that Insite, the safe injection site in Vancouver, cannot be shut down by the Conservative government because it saves lives.

I asked the Minister of Health if she would accept the ruling of the Supreme Court and commit to stopping the government's attack on Insite. She responded that she would be reviewing the decision. I am now hoping that the decision has been reviewed, accepted and will now be followed by the government.

There is no question that drug addiction remains a major health problem in Canada. It costs Canada approximately \$5 billion annually in economic costs including health care, lost productivity, property crime and enforcement. For example, in Vancouver an estimated 70% of criminal activity is associated with illicit drugs and roughly 63% of federal offenders have drug abuse problems. It is a major problem.

It is also a health problem. We are beginning to understand the neuroscience of addiction. We now know that drugs actually change the neural pathways in the brain making it difficult for addicts to cease using drugs permanently. As is the case with other neurological disorders, it causes changes in the brain and is actually a health problem.

The public wants the government to assist in the humanitarian effort to save lives. It wants the government to take the social objective of reducing drug addiction and the crimes associated with it seriously. It would also like government to pay attention to fiscal concerns and the responsible spending of tax dollars in doing so. In terms of those issues, I would contend that the Conservative government is working against the priorities of Canadians and not getting the job done.

The science is in on saving lives: Insite saves lives. There have been well over 20 peer-reviewed studies showing that. In one year there have been zero cases of overdoses among the drug users who have been supervised at Insite compared to over 200 overdose-related deaths on the streets of Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. Therefore, Insite does save lives.

Adjournment Proceedings

In terms of reducing drug addiction and crime, it is becoming increasingly clearer that treatment is a more effective and less expensive method. We see legislators in Texas wagging their fingers at the Canadian government because they believe our approach is wrong.

I heard in committee two weeks ago that the government has spent \$122 million in increased security costs to prevent drugs from getting into prisons but at the same time it has reduced treatment program availability to addicted inmates by \$2 million. Why would it reduce the treatment programs when treatment is the most effective method of dealing with that crime? For example, \$1 spent on treatment will achieve the same reduction in the flow of cocaine as will over \$7 spent on enforcement. The government has it backwards. It is not getting the job done. It is spending more tax dollars on its failed corrections policies and its failed tough-on-drugs approach.

The Conservative government has fought against Insite for the last few years. That is a testament to its ideology over evidence approach which—

• (1905)

The Deputy Speaker: Order. I must interrupt the hon. member. However, she will have one minute later in reply.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on this important issue. The Supreme Court of Canada has made its decision and although we are disappointed we are complying with the court's decision.

Our government is committed to addressing the issues related to illicit drug use here in Canada. A key pillar of our national anti-drug strategy is prevention and treatment for those with drug dependencies. Our government believes that spending money on treatment and support to help get people off drugs is the best investment we can make.

Since 2007, the health portfolio has invested \$577 million over the five years of the strategy's prevention, treatment and enforcement activities. As part of the strategy, we have made significant investments to strengthen existing treatment efforts through the treatment action plan.

For example, we have invested \$30 million over five years in a targeted mass media campaign. It raises awareness among parents and youth between the ages of 13 and 15 about the dangers of illicit drugs. Studies show that it is important to get those messages through to youth at that age.

Right now the youth campaign TV ads are on the air from October 3 to 30, and will run again from November 7 to December 11. The mass media campaign has seen impressive results. For example, 25% of parents who saw one of our TV ads have taken action by engaging in discussions with their children about drugs. That is great. There has also been an increase in the proportion of youth who say they know about the potential effects of illicit drug use on relationships with family and friends.

Under the prevention action plan, our government also funds health promotion and prevention projects for youth through the drug strategy community initiative fund. Since the announcement of the national anti-drug strategy in 2007, 103 such projects have been approved across Canada. This represents approximately \$40 million in multi-year community-based investments.

If we are able to save one child or one family from the negative impacts of drugs it will be money well spent.

I will conclude by stating our government is aware of the complex challenges faced by people addicted to drugs and the impact those drugs have on Canadian communities. We remain committed to working with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners to address the issues related to illicit drug use across Canada.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, the member opposite is expressing a commitment by the government that if it can save one child from the negative impacts of drugs it would do so.

I would invite the parliamentary secretary to reflect upon the fact that those people in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside who are addicted to drugs are someone's child. They are the very people who are dying of overdoses. However, that is not the case when they are treated at Insite where there has been zero overdose-related deaths.

Those vulnerable people who are addicted and who have this health problem are getting infected with AIDS which unfortunately can lead to a premature death. They are someone's child who could possibly die from the negative impacts of drug use. With Insite, that transmission is reduced if not eliminated because it prevents needle sharing.

• (1910)

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, the Supreme Court of Canada has made its decision and again I will state that although we are disappointed we will comply with the decision.

Our government believes that spending money on treatment and support to help people get off drugs is the best investment that we can make. This is the most effective way of building safe and healthy communities.

The health portfolio alone has invested \$577 million over five years for its prevention, treatment and enforcement activities. This represents an unprecedented level of funding for anti-drug initiatives by our government and reflects our commitment to the individuals, families and communities affected by drug use.

We will also continue to work with our provincial, territorial and municipal partners to address the use of drugs in the Downtown Eastside of Vancouver and across Canada. I think everyone knows that prevention is the best strategy.

Adjournment Proceedings

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak on the reply that I received to a fairly simple question. It had to do with the F-35s and the government's maintaining that the price per plane is \$75 million. It is clearly a preposterous position to take. I want to ask the Minister of National Defence whether he continues to adhere to that position.

I received one of the more lame responses that I have received to a question in question period for a long time. He said that the government budgeted \$9 billion and that it has a strong mandate to obtain the plane. It seems that the minister wishes to interpret his mandate as a mandate to blow money.

The government's position is that the cost of the plane is \$75 million per plane. The U.S. Congressional Budget Office, on the other hand, said it is more likely to cost \$133 million to get the plane. Our own Parliamentary Budget Officer said it is closer to \$150 million, which is virtually twice the cost that the government maintains, in spite of this great pile-up of facts to the contrary. We have to keep in mind that whatever price the U.S. pays is the price we will pay.

In the United States people are very skeptical of the numbers being put out by Lockheed Martin with respect to this airplane. Of course, it is based upon the assumption that 3,000, or 4,000, or 5,000 planes will actually be bought by the U.S., its various branches of the military, and the allies. If the orders are up, the price will go down, but if the orders are down, the price will go up. It is an inevitable fact of economics.

Based upon the best information available, the PBO and the U.S. Congressional Budget Office are saying that the cost at a very minimum will be \$133 million to \$150 million per plane. That is just the acquisition cost. In addition, there are all the back costs, which I am not going to get into.

As I said, if the orders are down, the price will be up. What does the current evidence say?

Turkey has already bailed on the program, so there goes quite a number of planes out the door.

Italy will not be able to afford anything. In fact, I doubt that Italy will be able to afford Cessnas, for goodness' sake, let alone these very sophisticated jets.

Denmark is holding an open competition. We in the Liberal Party have suggested for months if not years to the government that it can walk away at any given time from the commitment the previous government made to this process. Denmark is doing just that. It is walking away from whatever financial commitments it has made and it is holding an open competition.

Australia has given quite a strong indication that it, too, will bail on the program.

Japan, like Denmark, and as we should, is holding an open competition to get the best value for taxpayer dollars.

The U.K., Norway, and the Netherlands are stretching out their order purchases. Frequently, when a purchaser buys anything, let alone a jet plane, and stretches out the acquisition time period, it is

usually an indication that maybe it is not quite so firm on the acquisition. The U.K., of course, is extremely important to this entire program because it is the next largest buyer after the U.S.

Of course, the U.S. itself is facing financial difficulties which are extraordinary and likely to make the acquisition of this plane very difficult.

• (1915)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood for his question and the opportunity to answer it here in the House.

First, let me start by saying that in today's uncertain world, we cannot know all of the potential threats that Canada may face in the future. However, as we outlined in the Canada first defence strategy in 2008, the Royal Canadian Air Force requires a next generation fighter to carry out its core missions of defending Canadian sovereign airspace, defending North America as a partner in NORAD, and providing this country with an effective and modern capability for international operations.

The joint strike fighter is an advanced, adaptable and sustainable multi-role platform that will defend against those threats we can foresee today and those that we may encounter in the coming decades.

The F-35 is the only fighter aircraft available that meets the Canadian Forces' requirements. I should remind the member opposite that this aircraft was selected after an extensive and rigorous competitive process conducted by a partnership that the Liberal government joined.

The commitment to purchase next generation fighter aircraft was clearly spelled out in the Canada first defence strategy.

This commitment was made following a thorough analysis of the current and perceived roles and core missions that this fighter would be responsible for. The conclusion was that a fleet of next generation fighters will be required to successfully carry out Canada's obligations both at home and abroad.

More important, Canadian participation in the joint strike fighter program will bring high-value jobs and other economic benefits to our country for decades to come.

Canadian companies will have access to billions of dollars' worth of subcontracts for the entire production run of more than 3,000 joint strike fighters being purchased by partner nations under the JSF memorandum of understanding, as well as for the many potential additional aircraft that are expected to be acquired by non-partner nations.

This government remains on track to acquire these aircraft for the amount we have budgeted. These costs are based on actual detailed estimates calculated by the multinational joint strike fighter program office on an evolving basis and are validated through independent analysis.

Canada is purchasing the least costly variant of the aircraft at the most cost effective point of production.

Adjournment Proceedings

Canada is contributing a fixed amount to the development of the F-35 program.

The cost of the procurement as well as the sustainment of the F-35 fleet is fully funded through the Canada first defence strategy and the national defence investment plan.

While the Liberal members in the House have cold feet about the program they started, we remain steadfast in our support to the needs of the military and providing the resources it needs so that our troops can continue to do the important work that is asked of them.

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health for reading the notes of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence. I can see that he too has been taken in by the blandishments of the Minister of National Defence.

I do agree on one point, namely that we do live in uncertain days. However, there are certain certainties in these uncertain days, and the certain certainties are that the U.S. is under extraordinary financial pressure, and the EU is under extraordinary financial pressure, all of which will make it very difficult for any government, whether it is in North America or in the European Union to actually sustain a multi-billion dollar purchase of these airplanes, the consequence of which is, as I said earlier, that orders are actually down and countries are bailing on these purchases. The consequence of that is inevitably the price will go up and the costs—

• (1920)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Madam Speaker, one thing we can be sure of is that the Liberals are experts at bailing out. I think that was the issue with the helicopters that the armed forces did need.

The F-35 will help the Canadian Forces defend the sovereignty of Canadian airspace, remain a strong and reliable partner in the defence of North America, and provide Canada with an effective and modern capability for international operations.

This government is fully committed to delivering a modern, multi-role, combat capable Canadian Forces in a sustainable and affordable way. We are taking steps to improve efficiency and effectiveness at defence to be able to do just that.

The investments that this government committed to in the Canada first defence strategy will enhance the readiness and capabilities of the Canadian Forces. These investments will improve and increase training for personnel and make more equipment available for both training and operations.

Even as the government fulfills these commitments we will also ensure that all programs and initiatives will make the best and most efficient use of taxpayers' dollars.

That is our commitment.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:21 p.m.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 034 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Friday, October 21, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, October 21, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*English*]

COPYRIGHT MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed from October 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act, be read a second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member from Longueuil for sharing his time with me.

I rise to speak to Bill C-11. It is a complex and quite honestly dumbfounding piece of legislation. It attempt to strike a balance between the interests of consumers and stakeholders.

The need that the bill is meant to address has been lost in the haste of having legislation in place by an arbitrary date. However, it must not only answer immediate concerns but also future concerns of stakeholders. In its haste, the government is missing a golden opportunity to provide support for Canada's creators and in fact is abdicating its responsibility to them.

In this era of ever-evolving, growing and fluid digital integration of communications and entertainment, it is even more important that the bill strike a balance between the needs of Canadian consumers and their ability to access and enjoy artistic content and the undeniable rights of the creators of that content. It is imperative that a sound legal framework be established to protect the rights of creators and other stakeholders.

The works of artists can inspire, comfort, educate and on occasion help us express that which we are unable to express on our own. In addition, those works fuel the heart of a massive economic engine that drives \$85 billion into the Canadian economy and provides 1.1 million jobs, yet those works still are grossly undervalued. The bill underlines that fact by putting business, consumer and user rights ahead of the rights of the creators of those works.

The nature of copyright is better expressed in the French language, "droits d'auteur", meaning author's rights, the right of the author, the creator. That right gives artists the ability to determine how their

works will be used. Sadly, this is conspicuously absent from this document, or at least is addressed minimally.

As an artist, and an advocate of the bill since its previous incarnation as Bill C-32 through to its present state, I have discussed the issue at length. When meeting with individuals and members of organizations in my constituency office as well as here in Ottawa I hear the same concern expressed. Although they agree that new copyright legislation is needed, they all ask why money is being taken out of the pockets of artists and why their needs are not being addressed.

Indeed we have entered new territory and, as with anything new, there is always adaptation required. For the first time in history the types of physical controls that copyright holders held in the past are gone. Entertainment and academic works are accessed more easily and therefore are less protected.

What protection mechanisms do artists have? There are a few cursory exemptions from prosecution or civil action for consumers and their advocates. In exchange a rather dizzy and confusing series of vague obligations are offered, one of which includes shredding their class notes. The artists and cultural communities are offered lip service with regard to the principle of equitable compensation for their creative works. They are also offered an inconsistent and frankly scary approach toward the protection of those works as well as compensation for them.

In its present form, Bill C-11 is an unequivocal failure. It outright fails to satisfy the two most important benchmarks we as parliamentarians use for evaluation. It fails to establish clear universally understood rules for consumers. It also fails to ensure equitable enforceable compensation rules for those people who dedicate their lives to the creative enterprise.

• (1010)

Many of my colleagues have remarked on the many practical problems of this law, some of which we in the official opposition are committed to remedy through good faith dialogue at committee stage. I hope my colleagues across the way will work with us on this approach with purpose and in the spirit of openness.

Government Orders

After a long career in the arts, I came to Parliament as a voice for those artists and a voice for the constituents in my riding who are artists. From my perspective, this law's greatest weakness is its complete failure to extend or acknowledge the vital and current compensation framework upon which so many artists, writers, musicians and creators depend for their livelihood.

During the 2008 federal election, the Prime Minister made his feelings with regard to artists clear. We took exception to that, particularly in my home province of Quebec. The bill does little to show any change of heart regarding the Prime Minister's view. The images provoked by his words are misleading and undermine the artistic community, which contributes far more to this country than it receives.

Typically, today's Canadian artists continue to focus on their creative works more than where their next meal will come from. The typical artists in this country have a median income of under \$13,000, yet the government sees fit to take \$30 million a year out of their pockets.

That party's characteristic cynicism, for which it grows ever more famous, shows the value the members of the government have for artists.

I look at the discussion regarding digital access as a reminder of the wild west days when our forefathers came to this country and were given pieces of sticks and told to go out and stake their claims. For some reason, many people feel that the Internet offers that same opportunity. However, like our forefathers who staked their claims, there are people who own the rights to works of art found on this worldwide entity called the Internet.

The Internet is a tool. It is a medium through which we can access all sorts of information. However, if we walk down Sparks Street and the HMV doors are open, that does not give us the right to walk into HMV, put a CD in our pocket and leave. We must provide compensation, which is what the bill fails to do.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to my colleague's speech, which was very interesting. What struck me was the amount of \$30 million that creators can collect from the existing fund. That is a very small amount of money compared to everything that is at stake and compared to the total cultural economic activity.

Could my colleague talk to us more about the fact that what our creators and artists are calling for represents a drop of water in the economic ocean of all the potential spinoffs?

•(1015)

[English]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin: Mr. Speaker, the \$30 million is money that is collected from users for accessing the works of artists. However, in this digital age, it is virtually impossible to lock down everything.

Many years ago, a method for compensating artists was developed. Money was put into a fund from which artists drew. As the bill stands now, that money would no longer be available. The private copy levy placed on cassettes, CDs and CD-Rs, which is a nominal fee of 27¢ per disc, is where that money came from. With

the advent of other forms of digital media, CDs are virtually becoming obsolete and this money has been in decline since approximately 2006.

That is what the bill must provide compensation for. It expropriates that money without providing any form of compensation.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to debate Bill C-11, the copyright modernization bill. It is very appropriate that we are debating this bill today. It has a very useful function.

This week I had the opportunity to engage in dialogue with a variety of artists in my office, led by members of the Canadian Private Copying Collective, which is a group that works on these very issues. The livelihood of its members depends on the outcome of these issues. Artists across this country can only receive revenue for and in support of their works in certain areas. Although they have certain tools at their disposal, they do not identify the bill as being a significant addition to their tool chest and in many ways do not see it as a solution.

Artists liked the idea of the MP3 tax, but the Conservatives did not, so they held it up as a red herring and it was never put in place. That is unfortunate as the MP3 format is now the main means of copying music in this country. If we look at the shifting pattern of copying activity which the CPCC provided in its fact sheet, that is the direction in which the industry and people are going. Unfortunately, the legislation is not working very well.

I admit that I have never copied anything from the Internet or any music at all. I always buy music in a medium that comes in a plastic container with the artist's picture on the front and a description of his or her work. I find that to be an acceptable way to obtain music. I have not varied much from that. It might be that I am a bit of a Luddite or perhaps I am a polite person as well.

I believe that musicians provide a relief to society. Those young people in our society who engage in music are often not as troubled as those who are not because they have an outlet for their emotions.

When speaking with a young artist in my office he expressed the fact that he did not want digital locks on everything. Rather, he wanted society to recognize and respect him. He wished for an ordered society that would understand the rationale of the music industry just as drivers driving down a highway understand its rationale. As we are in a collective relationship as we head down that road we must work together to make that a part of our societal function.

Primarily, there is a need for education. However, the government uses draconian punishments that are hard to enforce and difficult for musicians to exercise. They would have to take their fans to court and fine them. As unfortunate as it is that someone would illegally copy a young musician's music, he or she could still be a fan. The thought of musicians taking people to court because they copied and listened to their music would not work in our society. That is not a remedy we want.

Government Orders

To create a society that respects musicians and their creativity we need to provide some education on that. The thought of detecting recordable sounds and copying them as evidence to be put in front of a court is ridiculous.

• (1020)

We have seen that. We have been in this modern age for quite a while. As a rule is set up, they will take it out.

We should not kid ourselves into thinking that, when we put in copyright legislation which puts the onus on the courts and the legal system to enforce these rules, it will work very well. We need to put more effort into our society, into education and into raising the standards of our society so that people understand that supporting artists is a good thing to do. We have done this in very innovative ways in the past.

Canadian artists make up 25% of radio broadcasting in Canada. That has been a mainstay of the Canadian music scene since I was a child, and that was quite a while ago. That is why musicians probably gather in \$50 million a year from SOCAN. The songwriters, the people who create the music, have that opportunity, which is a good thing. It works and it is in place.

The private copying of collective work was being done as well when most of the recordings were done on CDs. When we suggested that taxing the MP3 would help this situation without going to court and without the musicians having the burden of holding on to the rights or the burden put on the courts, we thought that would have been a more acceptable pathway toward what we are trying to accomplish.

Digital locks will not work for radio broadcasts. Right off the bat, this would be another way these things would be broken down and where songs can be recorded, even though they might be under digital locks in one fashion but not in another. They would be available to the public without the digital lock. Are we really creating anything of value here? Will this solution work?

I have trouble many times in the House with Conservative legislation. The government's legislation, in so many ways, appears to be kind of useless. It does not work for what we want to accomplish. I would ask Conservative legislators to look at the legislation. Is this really what they want to accomplish? Will this really work? What are their goals in putting this forward to us today? Are they going to protect musicians or are they going to put an unnecessary burden on musicians and on the court system trying to interpret and to intervene in these copying issues?

I stand with musicians in Canada. They play an enormous and good part in our society. I have supported them throughout my life in my role in municipal government. I have always promoted music festivals. I am always promoting the opportunity for people to expand their musical abilities. It is something that the House wants as well.

What is more important is to understand that the law is not what we want to create in Canada. What we want to create in Canada is the atmosphere of trust, confidence and respect among young people, among those who would perhaps take something for free rather than pay for it, because they do not understand that they are damaging people with that act.

We need to put our efforts in other directions. This bill does not suffice. It would not create the kind of Canada that we are after. As such, I would love to see more work done on the bill. I know this issue is important and I trust that parliamentarians will come to grips with it.

• (1025)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows that the bill seeks to modernize the Copyright Act, something that has been before Parliament for a number of years. One of the things we have been grappling with is the ability to protect the people who create. In my area of the country, some of the most important creators are those who create video games. One thing that truly impacts that sector of the economy are the pirates who try to break the locks and copy the games. They have the ability to put the creators out of business.

I wonder if the hon. member would agree with me that this bill strikes the appropriate balance in helping to protect very vulnerable industries and the creators so they know the valuable works they are creating will be protected and they will actually see the benefit of all of their hard work.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I have not had the opportunity to speak to video game producers. My emphasis is on musicians.

If the hon. member thinks that is of particular importance, could he explain to me how the bill would protect video game producers? It may well be that this particular part of the bill would help that industry. I would like to understand that better as well, of course. We are here to debate the bill, to understand how we can make the bill better and how these issues can be dealt with in our society.

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to follow up on the hon. member's question, would he comment on the concept of digital locks? Digital locks, being digital, are very easy to break. The minute a lock is put on, someone is working to break it.

Would the member comment on the possibility of finding ways to balance out compensation for everybody, including video game producers, musicians and audiovisual workers, and whether exploring a way of compensating for the potential loss might be a better way of approaching this issue?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, that is part of what comes from the Canadian private copying collective. The tax on CDs worked fine while CDs were the main instrument of copying. In some ways, it was a very non-intrusive effort and a good effort toward ensuring that there was some compensation for artists because we do not have a society that respects the rights of artists to hold their works without being copied. We needed to find some way around that and we did it without going to the courts. We did it through a tax system.

I still think that underlying this is a huge need to raise the level of respect in our society for artists and creative people. That would do more for the issue and society than penalties, fines and imprisonment through the court system.

Government Orders

● (1030)

[Translation]

Mr. Marc-André Morin (Laurentides—Labelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from Jeanne-Le Ber. I believe that the members on the other side are all very proud Canadians. I often hear them talk about our country's cultural influence and how dynamic our society is. I wonder what message they are sending to the people responsible for this influence when these members are doing absolutely nothing to protect creators and are instead taking care of those who make money from their work.

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Speaker, I see this as being another issue where we would create confrontation rather than solutions, which is what I see through this Copyright Act.

The confrontation, on the one hand, would come in the form of people finding technological solutions so they would not be covered under this particular law. That is the problem. We do not want people running around trying to find ways to copy so they do not fit under the law.

What we want is to have people respect and understand that our society is ordered on certain ways. That takes more time and effort but it is still the direction in which we need to go. Therefore, amending this law without having any idea of how we are moving our society is wrong. It will not work.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-11 and I am going to address most of my comments to the issue that we were finishing with my colleague from Western Arctic around the flaws in the bill regarding compensation for the creative people in this country.

It is appropriate that we set the bill in historical context. There is absolutely no question, and it has support from every member in the House, that we need to bring copyright and laws on copyright into the 21st century. We are clearly not there now as a country. In fact, it is fair to say that in the developed world we are near the bottom of the list in terms of modernizing our legislation and our rules regarding copyright.

There is no issue around supporting the bill at second reading. The basic underlying philosophy of the bill, which is what we are supporting, is that we do have to modernize. However, we want to be quite clear, as the official opposition, that there are significant amendments that are required to make the bill palatable to ourselves as a political party, but more importantly, palatable to the Canadian public as a whole and in particular to the creative classes if I can designate them that way.

The other point I would like to make at the outset is that historically there have been various times when societies have made major leaps forward in the creative fields. Probably the most recent one from my perspective in terms of major leaps was the Renaissance period in the 1500 early 1600s. If we study other parts of the world there have been similar types of advances. There is a huge leap forward.

If we look at those periods of time and ask, why did it happen, did somehow magically people become more creative? The reality and the answer is no, that is not what happened. What happened is that

society as a whole, both governments of the day and the wealthy members of society, came forward in a more extensive way than we see during other periods of time and supported their artists and creative classes.

We saw a major leap forward in Italy in particular during the Renaissance, certainly in England during the Shakespearian period in particular. When we ask how did that happen, it was a period of time when the wealthy and the governments or ruling classes of the day were much more prepared to ensure that those people within their society who had those creative juices were given the opportunity to expand their skills, talents and creativity.

When we are looking at a bill like this one, I believe we have to take that into account. Perhaps the greatest concern we have with the bill is that it will not enhance the financial viability of our creative people, but have just the opposite impact. There is a balance at all times between the owners of new technology, new developments in the arts, that has to be clearly balanced off against the actual creators of that new technology or new developments in the arts. It is our position that the bill is way too heavily weighted on the owner of content side than it is on the producers, developers and creative artists on their side.

● (1035)

I want to quote some numbers as to the current situation in Canada. The most recent figures we have, and this comes from the Canada cultural and arts industries, from ACTRA, the union that has great impact in that industry, indicate that the arts and culture industries contribute \$85 billion a year. To put that in context of the total economy, it is 7.4% of all revenue generated in Canada. It is a huge part of the market. It supports approximately 1.1 million jobs, which is about 6% of Canada's labour force.

It is quite clear that some of those numbers, and we argue some significant part of those numbers, both in terms of the revenue generated and the jobs created, would be jeopardized by the legislation.

It is quite clear that there are other steps that could be taken, in terms of investment in this industry. I always have a hard time thinking of artists, sculptors, and writers as being part of an industry but, in fact, they see themselves that way. They certainly are, as these numbers show, a significant part of our economy, and they have historically been, in a number of societies.

It is true today when we see some of the advances that we are making, not just on the technology side but in any number of areas. For me it is one of the areas of art that I follow most closely in terms of the arts. Writers in Canada have demonstrated to not only create great writings for the domestic market but to have gone on to the international stage.

I was in Ireland recently. I remember talking to a member of its parliament who commented about how much, and I say this from an Irish background, the Irish of course have been producing for the world great writers for a long period of time, Canada now fits into that. In fact, the parliamentarian was claiming in part that it was because of the genes that came from the Irish ancestry that had settled in Canada.

Government Orders

However, we have dominated, in many respects, at the international level for a good number of years, going back certainly into the 1960s where our writers have moved on to the international stage and have created a market for their writings but have also enhanced literature in the world as a result of the work they have done here in Canada and then taken it internationally.

However, think of all the other writers who did not get that chance because we did not create enough opportunities for them. I am going to quote another figure here from the 2009-10 fiscal period. The median earning of an artist in Canada that year was \$12,900. I do not even think that takes them to the minimum wage, the legal minimum wage in most provinces in this country. We have to do better in that regard.

Again, coming back to the bill. Because of this shift in balance favouring the content owners, we are at some risk that the \$12,900 figure in subsequent years is going to go down. The estimate is that millions of dollars are going to be taken out of the hands and control of the creative classes and shifted over to the content owners.

If that is in fact the result, we know we have to move significant amendments. We have had pressure internationally from both multinational corporations and some governments to use the U.S. model in this regard. In terms of protecting both our sovereignty of not wanting that kind of interference when we legislate but also in terms of protecting those artists we absolutely must have amendments to the bill in this regard.

• (1040)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, at the very least we can say that, unlike the third party, this party is actually prepared to read the bill and work with us to get it to committee and hear what even more Canadians have to say. We spent a lot of time in the previous Parliament on this bill and heard from a number of witnesses. I spent a lot of time over the summer doing the exact same thing.

Over the last couple of weeks, there has been a lot of disagreement among members of the NDP over a number of different issues within their party but there always seems to be unanimity on one issue; that is, when there is talk about increasing taxes on Canadians. It seems to me that this speaker and also the speaker before, the member for Western Arctic, continuously talk about bringing back taxes on Canadians, whether it is an iPad tax or any other form of tax.

I wonder if the member could just clarify for me if the overriding dilemma or problem that the members opposite have with this bill is that it does not tax Canadians enough. Is that the problem they are having? Are they truly going to continue to advocate for a tax on iPads? Where will it go? Will we be taxing people who make PVR recordings of their favourite TV shows? I just wonder how far along the tax road we are going to go with this.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, that shows a significant lack of understanding of what we are talking about on this side of the room and, more importantly, because this cannot be driven just by political parties but by the creative classes.

They are saying very clearly to us that they want to be paid. We are not talking about taxation here. They want to be paid for their services. The content owners are saying they have development costs

and they want to be compensated for that, not only fairly but extremely generously.

All we are saying is the creative groupings, those content owners, go nowhere unless this work is done and it is only going to be done, and done well, if they are properly compensated. We are talking about people being paid for the work they do and being paid at least reasonably well, let me say "fairly", nowhere near as generously as we hear from the content owners and the demands they have.

This is not about taxation at all. It is about a fee that is being imposed. As a lawyer, I expected my fees were going to be paid for the work that I did. If I am creating a piece of art or a new piece of technology I would expect to be paid accordingly, fairly, in direct compensation for what I have done and for what it has contributed to my society. The whole question has a basic fallacy at its base. This is not about taxation. This is about fair compensation in the marketplace.

• (1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take advantage of my colleague's legal expertise to try to clarify a few things.

If I invented a new technology, my rights would be protected by patents that would bring in the money I need to continue creating. As an artist, my rights are protected, in principle, by copyright. However, if I am a content owner, there does not seem to be any protection for me. If I am not mistaken, this bill will take money from artists' copyright and transfer it. I would like my colleague to clear that up and to tell me if I am understanding correctly.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is completely right. That is what the government's bill does. It is clear that the government completely ignored the consultations and testimonies from the last Parliament.

As the hon. member said, the evidence and testimonies are there, but the Conservatives completely ignored them.

[English]

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise to talk about the bill before the House.

Since I have spent more of my life as a teacher in a university than as a politician, I thought I would focus on the implications for the university and college sector.

In this regard there is both good news and bad news. The bill gives the educator something positive and in another way takes that back. I am referring to the new fair dealing rights and exceptions, where education is now included. This will make it somewhat easier for teachers in the classroom to use certain materials without arduous cost.

Some of the producers have objected to this, but my impression is that it is a positive thing. Some teachers want to innovate. An example would be teachers who want to show a one-minute clip of a movie to make a point, but currently they cannot do that without paying very high copyright fees.

Government Orders

The impact of this new education right on producers will be less negative than some have claimed. This is because in determining what is considered fair, our courts use a two-step test created by the Supreme Court of Canada to determine whether a use is fair or not. The first step is to determine whether the use of a work is for one of the fair dealing purposes listed in the act. The second step is to assess the fairness of the use against six factors, including the amount of the work used and the effect of the use on the market for the work. Using this test, our courts have consistently determined that the scenarios envisioned by creators, unmitigated free copying with no payments, is not fair and thus is not permitted.

A clear definition of what is fair should be included in the act. One way to accomplish this would be to embed the Supreme Court's two-step test into the act itself.

That overall is positive, fair, reasonable and balanced. The problem comes with the issue of the digital locks.

Bill C-11 introduces new rights for Canadians to make copies of copyrighted works for personal use, such as format shifting, time shifting and making backup copies, but Bill C-11's new digital lock provisions override these new rights. In other words, under this new law, if a company puts a digital lock on a CD, the person who buys the CD cannot circumvent the lock to put the music on to his or her iPod without breaking the law. This exact issue was a highly controversial change which was fought when the Conservatives' previous copyright bill was introduced.

A long list of leading academics, educators, librarians, archivists, documentary filmmakers and citizens have expressed legitimate concern that digital lock provisions will undermine the balance that copyright law is intended to strike between creators and users, completely undermining a user's ability to use copyrighted works that they have purchased.

Several experts, including Canadian research chair, Professor Michael Geist, have suggested an easy way to fix this would be to amend the bill to make it okay to circumvent a digital lock if the purposes for which a lock was circumvented were lawful. This would be an easy amendment to make to the bill. It would preserve that better balance which I think most of us are seeking.

Because restrictive digital locks can effectively undermine consumer rights articulated in the copyright law and the very balance copyright law seeks, and because the Conservatives have made no attempt to change their stance on digital locks, that is sufficient reason for the Liberals to oppose the bill.

• (1050)

Going back to my example of education, the bill makes it easier for educators to use materials in their classrooms, but then it negates that advantage by bringing in these digital locks which, under certain circumstances, would make it illegal for the professor to produce the clip or other material which he or she wished to use in class. It would be lawful to use that material in the class, but because of the digital locks, it would be unlawful to produce the material which is legal to use. That makes no sense. That is why we in the Liberal Party are extremely concerned about this issue of digital locks.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, as an educator had great

concerns about the copyright legislation. I looked into it and talked to people in the educational community. They are very satisfied with the way the bill is now. In fact, the Association of Universities and Colleges supports this bill. It said:

This bill reflects a fair balance between the interests of creators and users of copyright works and is a positive step forward for university communities across Canada.... [The bill] clarifies important questions and will help ensure students and learners have access to the content they need, including digital material.

As my colleague across the way mentioned, the law now says that teachers can use any media to show these types of products. Before it specifically indicated they could be used in overhead projectors and flip charts, but now it takes away references to specific technologies so that modern technology can be used in the classroom. The universities and colleges are very happy with this legislation. They say it is fair treatment protecting both creators and users. It also improves the technological availability to our classroom teachers across Canada. I would hope that the member across the way, as a former teacher, would support that.

• (1055)

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, the most charitable response is to say that my colleague's quote by the Association of Universities and Colleges is incomplete. It is not completely happy with this bill.

I happen to have with me a direct quote by James Turk, executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers. Here is what he said:

We are pleased that the Bill reflects the priorities of Canada's academic and research community to expand fair dealing specifically for educational purposes.... This represents a genuine effort to introduce balance into Canadian copyright law.

That is the part that my hon. colleague likes. Mr. Turk went on to say:

At the same time we are disappointed that the legislation makes it illegal to circumvent digital locks, even for lawful reasons such as fair dealing.

That was precisely my point and it is precisely stated by the executive director of the Canadian Association of University Teachers.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the hon. member's speech. I, too, am very worried about digital locks and anti-circumvention measures. Last spring, ironically enough, the members across the way were tearing their hair out during the debate about Statistics Canada and prison terms related to the long form census.

In Bill C-11, people who try to bypass a security measure could be fined \$1 million or sentenced to up to five years in prison. Given that the omnibus bill will make it even more difficult for someone sentenced to jail time to be rehabilitated, could Bill C-11 have serious consequences?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree with the point raised by my colleague. It is not a good idea to put people in jail for such reasons. But Bill C-11 is not surprising given that the Conservatives want to put almost everyone in prison.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act. Modernizing copyright is a legitimate goal, but how we achieve that goal is what must be debated. However, before I focus on any specific aspects of what the Conservatives are proposing, I would like to take a moment to share a little story.

Please allow me to illustrate the injustice suffered by our creators with an example taken from the reality facing wheat producers in the west. Imagine that a company has invented a revolutionary way to duplicate wheat to allow the synthesis of an equally high-quality flour used in a simple, practical, compact machine that makes sliced bread. Thanks to a sophisticated device, the wheat can be duplicated almost exactly, so well in fact that once it is milled into flour, the illusion is complete and the machine can produce tasty, fresh, aromatic bread. But it does not end there. The machine is quickly improved. It becomes more compact, lighter and easier to use. It can now even make buttered toast with a choice of toppings: peanut butter, jam or, my personal favourite, honey. It is easy to carry around so you can have breakfast anywhere; you can have a nice piece of bread in your car, on the bus or at the office. As a bonus, all of these places then smell like fresh bread or buttered toast, to everyone's amazement and delight.

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member, but it is time to proceed to statements by members. The hon. member will have eight minutes to finish his speech after question period.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

SOCER

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Saint Boniface, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am so excited to rise today to celebrate and to congratulate some very extraordinary young female soccer athletes from Winnipeg.

Two teams, the Bonivital Flames girls under 16 years and the Flames girls under 14 years, both won their Manitoba Soccer Association cup earlier this month. Coincidentally, both had to face their talented rivals, the Football Club Northwest, in their final matches. Victory was sweet and this was the perfect way to end their exceptional season. Both teams went on to the nationals, achieving their goal of placing higher than they did last year.

As an avid soccer player and a soccer coach myself, I know how hard these girls had to work. I am so proud of their efforts.

Congratulations to all of our tremendous players, their proud families and, of course, their dedicated coaches, Stan Kern for the girls under 14 and Terry Schultz for the girls under 16.

Statements by Members

Keep up the great work, and go Flames, go.

* * *

• (1100)

DUNCAN

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hometown of Duncan just took over the least coveted spot in British Columbia, the town with the highest unemployment rate. Unemployment has jumped to 11.6%, while the average in B.C. is only 6.7%.

There are many reasons why. A downturn in construction and agriculture has left many people looking for work. The high cost of the ferry service means it is less affordable to start new manufacturing anywhere on the Island. We are still waiting to hear if the government will invest in the Island corridor railway to help reduce freight costs. A ruinous forestry policy has kept local mills closed, while raw log exports continue to climb. Most disturbingly of all, youth unemployment is two times higher than the average.

Duncan has a large population under 25 years of age, many of them from the Cowichan first nation. We need to invest in these youth to ensure they have the skills to fill any available openings. The best way is a skills training program that is locally provided and focuses on the needs of the employers in the area.

Those youth are waiting for the government to take the issue of high unemployment seriously and develop a jobs plan that will help them and all others still looking for work in Duncan find a job.

* * *

MUNICIPAL AND REGIONAL GOVERNANCE

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last month at UBCM, which was held in Vancouver, British Columbia, two politicians from my riding were recognized for their contributions to municipal and regional governance.

Jim Ogilvie has been serving the city of Kimberley for 43 years. He was the mayor from 1965 to 2002 and 2005 to present. He has served on the Regional District of East Kootenay for countless years in a number of capacities. His knowledge of policy and procedure at the municipal and regional levels is outstanding.

Statements by Members

Sharon Fraser is a councillor for the District of Sparwood and has served her community for 25 years. As mayor, I had the pleasure of working with Sharon for six years. Her no-nonsense approach and colourful language always kept me on my toes.

I would like to especially congratulate these two individuals, as well as all municipal politicians, for their contributions to grassroots politics municipal government.

WORLD HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE DAY

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, World Hospice and Palliative Care Day was last Saturday, October 8 and I am pleased, as a founding member of the Parliamentary Committee on Palliative and Compassionate Care, to call attention to the noble goals of this international day of action.

Non-communicable conditions like cancer, diabetes or cardiovascular diseases account for 60% of death worldwide. That is why this year's theme "Many diseases, many lives, many voices—Palliative care for non-communicable conditions" draws attention to the all too frequent incidences where palliative care is not available for the medical, emotional and social needs of those suffering through an illness and their families.

This year, advocates for more and better palliative care gathered at events across 70 countries to raise funds and increase public awareness. I encourage all my hon. colleagues to join me in applauding their efforts and to take this opportunity to recommit, as elected representatives and as leaders, to finding ways to ensure that where there is need, palliative care is available.

HUNGARIAN CANADIANS

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise to pay tribute to Canadians of Hungarian descent on this 55th anniversary of the 1956 Hungarian uprising.

The freedom fight of 1956 was a bold attempt by Hungarians to establish solidarity away from the long arm of Soviet and Communist rule. After this uprising, over 200,000 Hungarians fled their homes into neighbouring countries and 38,000 were welcomed in Canada with warmth and compassion.

The bloodshed 55 years ago bears powerful witness to the unwavering spirit of freedom that resounds in the hearts of the Hungarian people.

Today I invite all hon. members to join me in commemorating the shining example of idealism, patriotism and sheer courage that is the immortal legacy of the freedom fighters of the Hungarian revolution.

God bless Canada és Isten áldja Magyarországot.

● (1105)

[Translation]

HONORÉ-MERCIER

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take a moment to commend a colleague from my riding of

Honoré-Mercier, the mayor of Rivière-des-Prairies—Pointe-aux-Trembles, Chantal Rouleau. I want to acknowledge her courage in how she carries out her duties. She recently publicly condemned the collusion and corruption she has observed in the construction industry for years. In so doing, she has restored the confidence of people who had become disillusioned by politics, and I congratulate her for that.

I would also like to commend two organizations in my riding that work to improve people's lives and that just held their benefit gala on October 15: Génération Éducation, whose mission is to help elementary school students from disadvantaged neighbourhoods by providing financial and moral support tailored to the specific needs of each student; and, the Quebec Latin-American Chamber of Commerce, an agency that showcases the contributions made by immigrant professionals and entrepreneurs.

Finally, I want to congratulate the people of Tunisia on their first free election since 1956.

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has committed to moving the House of Commons toward fair representation. We are committed to ensure that any update to the formula for allocating House of Commons seats will be fair to all provinces.

We will increase the number of seats now and in the future to better reflect the growth of faster growing provinces and we will ensure that the number of seats for the other provinces does not fall.

We expect the support of all members in the House for this important democratic move. That great statesman and Father of Confederation, George Brown, was passionate about securing the principle of representation by population in Canada. Today's members of Parliament should do no less.

A move toward fair representation by population would give more seats to the growing provinces, while protecting the seat counts of all the other provinces.

We are governing for all Canadians.

SOUTH CARIBOO AFGHANISTAN PROJECT

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I would like to pay tribute to the South Cariboo Afghanistan project. A decade ago, Mr. Jack Witty of 100 Mile House was moved by stories of the rebuilding effort in Afghanistan to ask the question: "What would happen if a rural community like the South Cariboo helped a rural community in Afghanistan to rebuild?"

Statements by Members

In partnership with Mr. Esmat Nazaryar, an Afghan Canadian from the village of Jeloucha in northern Afghanistan, the South Cariboo Afghanistan project set out to help rebuild Mr. Nazaryar's community.

Since 2004, with support from Hope International, the Aga Khan Foundation and CIDA, this project has helped to construct a medical clinic, clean water system, roads, a seed and animal bank and a school.

Mr. Nazaryar and his family visited 100 Mile House last month to convey the thanks of the community of Jeloucha to all those in the South Cariboo who supported the rebuilding process. For many in northern Afghanistan, Canada is a place called 100 Mile House.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FORILLON PARK EXPROPRIATIONS

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1970, the Quebec government expropriated the homes of approximately 225 families and the land of 1,500 people in the Gaspé to allow the federal government to create Forillon Park. The people expropriated still feel very bitter about it.

Last February, the members of this House apologized. It was the long-awaited first step towards reconciliation. Forillon Park then gave the expropriated families a pass granting them free access to the park. Other measures have been or will be implemented.

I would like to point out that, yesterday, in the National Assembly of Quebec, a motion to apologize to the people expropriated from Forillon was introduced by the provincial members for Matane and Gaspé, Mr. Bérubé and Mr. Mamelon. The motion was unanimously adopted by Quebec MNAs. Thus, another step was taken yesterday to ease the pain of those expropriated from Forillon Park.

* * *

[*English*]

NORTH KOREA

Mr. Bob Dechert (Mississauga—Erindale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in North Korea is appalling. As noted recently by the UN's Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights in North Korea, there are up to 200,000 political prisoners languishing in North Korean concentration camps, a sharp increase from 10 years ago. Reports of the conditions in these gulags are shocking, including executions, torture, rapes and forced abortions on female prisoners.

Canada remains gravely concerned by the lack of fundamental freedoms in North Korea. Our government has imposed sanctions and a controlled engagement policy on this rogue regime.

I urge the regime in Pyongyang to release its political prisoners and co-operate with the international community.

• (1110)

[*Translation*]

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to proudly recognize the many community organizations that provide prevention services to the people, particularly the young people, of Terrebonne, Blainville and Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines.

In this world full of inequality, many young people have difficulty finding their place, a problem that can manifest itself in various ways, such as addictions, depression and crime.

There are many prevention organizations in my riding: Uniatox, the youth shelters and the Centre rayons de femmes, just to name a few.

For 32 years and with very limited resources, Uniatox has helped many individuals who were at risk of developing addictions or committing crimes by focusing on the early detection of distress among young people.

If the Canadian government truly wants to make streets and communities safer, it must invest in prevention by providing funding to community organizations like the ones I just mentioned.

* * *

[*English*]

RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Coptic Christian minority has suffered the wrath of Islamic terrorist thugs who are slaughtering innocent women and children. It is the responsibility of the Egyptian government to finally protect all citizens, regardless of religion.

Thanks in part to the good work of the Conservative member for Mississauga—Erindale, this government is working to establish a new office of religious freedom. This is but one of the early steps that this government is taking in the great tradition of our country to stand on the side of those who are persecuted, to give voice to the voiceless, defence to the defenceless.

We will stand in solidarity with the Coptic Christian minority, as they fight for their rights for freedom of religion, for peace and for harmony in Egypt.

* * *

SMALL BUSINESSES

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past week Canadians celebrated Small Business Week with over 350 events across the country.

Canada is made up of small and medium-sized businesses. They are the vast majority of all companies and employ 6 of every 10 private sector workers. They are innovative and service-oriented. They are the lifeblood of Canadian communities.

Oral Questions

I was an entrepreneur and business owner for many years before running for public office. I appreciate the hard work, dedication and optimism that it takes, and I understand the challenges. Small businesses give much to Canadian society and they need government to do its part in return.

Here is what I hear from businesses, “Give us less red tape, not just another study; reduce rather than increase our EI payroll tax burden; and accept our ideas for fixing complex tax and reporting requirements that are rigid and overlapping”.

Today I want to congratulate everyone who owns, runs or works in a small business for their immeasurable contributions to Canadian life. I ask all Canadians to support their local small businesses.

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NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the *Toronto Sun* had it right this morning with its headline “NDP sails in different directions on ship contracts”.

The NDP’s placeholder leader was calling for political interference in this process, despite the fact that the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore had it right when he said that the selection process was fair, praising the announcement as “a great day for Canada, no question. Yes, sir”.

This again proves that the NDP is disunited and weak when it is faced with such tests in the House. Contradicting itself on such critical issues, Canadians are wondering who really speaks for the NDP.

Our government continues to be focused on what matters to Canadians, job creation and economic growth.

Meanwhile, the NDP caucus is not able to stay united when times get tough.

NDP spokesmen are taking different positions on different issues and Canadians are wondering if they can be trusted to actually do their job. They know that on this side of the House we will continue to remain focused on jobs and the economy because that is what Canadians have asked for.

* * *

CANADA WORLD YOUTH

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to Canada World Youth celebrating its 40th anniversary. This is a non-profit organization that offers international educational programs for young people. To mark the occasion, more than 140 Canadian municipalities have declared this week as “Canada World Youth Week”.

Over the years, 34,000 youth have taken part in exchange and international programs in over 67 countries. One of my own constituents, Alexander Economou, is serving in Mali right now.

• (1115)

[Translation]

Canada World Youth continues to change the lives of thousands of young Canadians by helping them become active citizens and

compassionate leaders. I encourage all hon. members to learn about its excellent work.

[English]

We wish Canada World Youth many more years of success in promoting youth engagement in Canada and all over the world.

* * *

NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is a confused group. The many contradictory positions taken this week show that the official opposition is not even coherent, let alone united. They are out of their league, and their caucus shows it through their contradictory positions on critical issues. Canadians must be wondering who really speaks for the NDP.

For example, their interim leader is calling for mandatory bilingualism of Supreme Court justices, yet the NDP House leader, one of their top lieutenants and the party’s representative on the committee, supported the nominations for the two new Supreme Court justices as part of an all-party process. It is evidence that the NDP caucus is not able to stay united when times get tough.

This week, NDP spokesmen have taken contradictory stands on issues such as the merit-based selection of Supreme Court justices. This is yet another worrying example that the weak and disunited NDP is out of their league and simply not fit to govern.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

LIBYA

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday was a historic day for Libya. The future of that country now belongs to all Libyans. The time now has come for Canada to withdraw its military operation and it is time to focus on diplomacy and helping rebuild that country.

All across the Middle East, we are seeing ordinary citizens demand freedom. Canada must be ready to support them in all ways. Can the minister now inform the House what Canada will do to foster democracy and support Libya as well as the Arab Spring?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the military mission is very quickly coming to an end. The UN-sanctioned mission to protect Libyan civilians from Gadhafi’s regime has certainly accomplished its goal.

Oral Questions

We are working now on diplomatic efforts. I visited Tripoli just last week, where we announced up to \$10 million to support two things: one, democratic development in Libya, and two, the demilitarization of the country. Those are obviously two important priorities.

Our embassy is now back open and our ambassador is on the ground. We are going to do everything we can to support the new government.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the NDP, I would like to say how proud we are of the role our troops have played in Libya. We agreed with the United Nations: we had to intervene to stop a dictator from killing his own people.

Throughout the Middle East we are seeing people fighting for freedom. Canada has to be prepared to support them. Is it possible for the minister to be more clear about what our country is going to do to help Libya?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are also very proud of the Canadian Forces who, once again, have contributed to democracy and human rights. They have done very good work under the leadership of General Charles Bouchard. He was the leader of the entire NATO mission. We were very proud of their contribution.

We will continue to work with the new Libyan government on advancing democracy and demilitarizing the country. These two goals are very important. We have already committed to that through our ambassador. I was in Tripoli last week to offer help to the new government.

* * *

[*English*]

JUSTICE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on the omnibus crime bill, Bill C-10, yesterday at committee a representative from the Canadian Association of Crown Counsel was highly critical of the problem overload that prosecutors have in this country. They have it already.

Instead of putting more police officers in our communities, with Bill C-10 the government's plan is to jam up our courts and prisons. The prosecutors have been very clear, both provincially and federally, that they cannot carry the load anymore.

When is the government going to come clear on what Bill C-10 would cost, and what is the government going to do about relieving the pressure on our prosecutors?

•(1120)

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in committee yesterday the crown prosecutor certainly expressed some concern about overload, but the prosecutors were in essence pleading for more resources to ensure that the mandate they carefully carry out to protect Canadian citizens is carried out, as is the intent of Bill C-10.

Certainly we will dedicate all the resources necessary to ensure that cities and communities are safe, because we will stand up for citizens and we will protect victims.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's justice minister has clearly stated that the Conservatives' crime bill does not pass the test. The Quebec government recommends an approach based on the rehabilitation and reintegration of young offenders, rather than one based on repression. Quebec's approach has proven to be very successful for many years.

Will this government respond to Quebecers' legitimate demands and amend this bill?

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here is something new: Canadians gave us the mandate to protect people and keep our streets safe. This is really nothing new. It is a clear mandate. Clearly, Quebec has some concerns, particularly with regard to young offenders, but this bill targets violent and repeat young offenders. Why? Because they are a threat to ordinary people.

With regard to young offenders, clearly they may be incarcerated; however, young people age 18 and younger will not be put in adult prisons.

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the hon. member's math skills are just as good as the Minister of Finance's. I do not know what a clear mandate means, when 61% of the population voted against this government in the May 2 election.

The Minister of Public Safety suggested that Quebec cut its social and educational programs to pay for his crime bill. He refuses to listen to the Quebec National Assembly's unanimous request, which states that some of the bill's provisions go against Quebec's interests. That is serious.

When will this government stop doing whatever it wants and listen to the opinion of a province that knows what it is talking about?

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one thing is certain: Quebec knows what it is talking about, as does the rest of Canada. Perhaps all Canadians did not support us, but 70% of them definitely did not support the NDP. We are still targeting violent, repeat offenders. We are standing up for victims and ordinary people. We are asking the NDP to do the same.

* * *

LIBYA

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the entire world saw that, after 42 years of dictatorship, Libyans can now turn the page on a dark period in their history marked by repression and terror. Today, they have the opportunity to lay the foundation for a state where the rule of law will prevail over the whims of a dictator. Libyans will need a great deal of support and guidance to achieve this. What the Minister of Foreign Affairs said is fine, but, yesterday, we heard the Prime Minister say that he is ready to abandon Libya.

Where is the plan to support the reconstruction process?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I visited Tripoli last week to give Libya's interim president a direct offer of assistance and support in two very important areas: democratic development and the demilitarization of the country. These two objectives are very important. We announced approximately \$10 million in aid for the new Libyan government; which was very pleased with our offer of assistance.

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while some might celebrate the death of Mr. Gadhafi, the means of his death is deeply troubling. It is equally troubling to those of us who support the rule of law and the legitimate aspirations of the people of Libya for freedom.

I wonder whether the minister is equally concerned about this revenge killing, as it will perpetuate a cycle of violence. To ensure that the efforts of our brave men and women are not wasted, will the Government of Canada immediately offer assistance to the NTC for decommissioning and democratic institution building—

• (1125)

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my first thoughts are with the Libyan people, not with their former dictator.

We have offered in Tripoli, directly to the leadership of the new government in Libya, President Jalil and to Acting Prime Minister Jibril, support for democratic development in terms of how they could draft a constitution, how they could build a better justice system, how they could conduct elections. We have offered a substantial amount of support where I think Canada can contribute.

Second, we have offered assistance to demilitarize the country. That is tremendously important. A lot of shoulder-to-air missiles have gone missing, and we are obviously very concerned about the large stockpile of chemical weapons. They pose a danger not just to the people of Libya, but also to the broader international community.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to veterans, Conservatives were asleep at the switch yesterday. The Conservatives are slashing funding for Veterans Affairs just as a new influx of Afghanistan veterans needs our support in dealing with debilitating injuries, including post-traumatic stress. Our brave vets have earned the support of Canadians, and we are behind our veterans. Liberals have forced the Veterans Affairs committee to get behind our veterans.

What is it going to take to finally get the Conservatives behind our veterans and stop these cuts?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government has been as strong in stepping up for our military, and in particular our veterans, as this Conservative government.

After years of neglect by our predecessors in the Liberal government, we have made sure that veterans are getting their due; that includes, of course, enhanced benefits that they will continue to get into the future.

We have enhanced those benefits to make up for the deficiencies of the past, improving access to monthly benefits for seriously injured veterans to up to \$1,600 per month for life. We have introduced a monthly \$1,000 supplement for most seriously injured or ill veterans. We have done numerous other things for our veterans. We will always be there for our veterans.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in August we saw that the number of people receiving employment insurance benefits increased by 6.6%, and this number continues to rise. But the government is cutting employment insurance services and turning its back on Canadian families when they need it most. This government needs to stop hiding behind excuses.

When will it stop giving tax cuts to its corporate buddies and the help people who need employment insurance?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government was given a strong mandate to create jobs and lower taxes, a low tax plan for jobs and growth. This plan is working, with the creation of over 650,000 new jobs since July 2009. We are focused on what matters to Canadians: job growth, expanding the economy, investing in skills training, and helping those who are the hardest hit.

In budget 2011, our hiring tax credit for small businesses provides a one year EI tax break for over 525,000 small businesses. These initiatives are creating jobs.

Mr. Hoang Mai (Brossard—La Prairie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, families have known for a long time that under the Conservative government they are just not getting ahead. Yesterday, the Canadian Index of Wellbeing reported the same findings the Conference Board did a month ago. They reported that the gap between the rich and the rest of us is growing and employment insurance claims are rising dramatically. This is the reality for Canadian families and still the Conservatives refuse to act.

When will the government start fighting for families?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we continue to fight for families, but the NDP fights against everything we want to put forward in legislation that does help families. Canadian families want jobs. The best social program that any government can provide is an environment where the private sector can grow jobs.

We have all heard time and again that over 650,000 jobs were created, not totally because of our economic action plan but because of all the implementation. I would remind hon. members that the NDP voted against every one of those initiatives.

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VETERANS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the truth of the Conservative Party's record on veterans affairs is rather quite dismal when we look at the fact that more and more veterans are now using food banks. In the city of Calgary alone, there is a food bank for veterans only. In 2005, it had 58 members and in 2010 it had over 200.

More and more veterans are becoming homeless, more and more veterans are frustrated with the system. Instead of streamlining the system to the point where veterans get more of the benefits, the government is cutting the department by \$226 million.

If it really wants to do something, it should cut the Veterans Review and Appeal Board, get rid of the political appointees, and deal with the veterans—

•(1130)

The Speaker: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be very clear, we are not cutting benefits to veterans. We are looking at efficiencies at the department, cutting red tape, and making things much more efficient for our veterans.

When it comes to homelessness and food banks, our government record is incredibly clear. We are the ones who created the new veterans emergency access fund that helps veterans and their families when there are no other funds available to them. We are the ones who have actually doubled the number of operational stress injury clinics.

No government in Canada's history has done more for veterans than the Stephen Harper government.

The Speaker: Order. I would remind the hon. member not to use proper names but ridings or titles.

The hon. member for Pontiac.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is just more government rhetoric. It is sad that veterans are not able to see positive changes in their daily lives.

This government plans to cuts jobs at Veterans Affairs Canada because the Conservatives claim there are fewer veterans in the country today. But that is the exact opposite of what the veterans'

ombudsman is saying. There are currently 700,000 veterans in the country, and that number is growing. Why is this Conservative government turning its back on veterans?

[*English*]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, to be clear, we will maintain benefits to our veterans, including the enhanced benefits that our government introduced just two weeks ago. Changes at the Department of Veterans Affairs, as I mentioned, are focused on improving efficiency, cutting red tape, and improving service to veterans. Our government continues to deliver quality care to our veterans and a key component of that is our operations in Charlottetown.

* * *

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, culture does not grow only in the big cities. It is created in all corners of the country, including rural Canada. The cultural capital program is a boost to the rural economies and an essential part of preserving rural Canadian culture. Yet the government has decided to wipe out the small communities category.

Small Canadian communities have made a large contribution to our country's cultural fabric. Why are they being shut out of this important program?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government in history has actually done more for culture than this government. During the economic downturn, we are the only government that not only maintained funding for arts and culture but increased funding for arts and culture.

We understand how important it is, not only to the large cities, to urban areas, but to all of our rural areas. That is why in communities across this country festivals are being supported, the arts are being supported, and we are very proud of our record.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives continue to turn their backs on families with these cuts. This week we learned that the Department of Canadian Heritage is making cuts to the cultural capitals of Canada program. It is cutting cultural capitals of less than 50,000 people. Rouyn-Noranda is one of them.

The community of Rouyn-Noranda depends on the program to promote the arts and create jobs. Why is the government abandoning this community?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate for the hon. member. We have actually increased funding for arts and culture in Canada. We are the only G7 country in the midst of an economic downturn to increase funding. We understand how important this sector is to the Canadian economy. It is responsible for thousands of jobs across this country.

The real question is, why does the NDP always vote against initiatives that would help support our artists? When we talk about increasing funding to the arts community, why does it always vote against it?

* * *

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, cuts to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans have left our fishermen feeling like they have been set adrift in a sea of uncertainty, written off by the Conservative government.

The boom has been lowered on the resource conservation council and on the search and rescue marine subcentre in my riding of St. John's South—Mount Pearl, but with another \$57 million in planned cuts, we know there is even more to come, worse to come.

Which part of our fisheries, of our culture, will the Conservatives set adrift next?

● (1135)

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, strategic review is an opportunity to assess the performance of all departments within government. It also allows us to ensure that we are responding to the priorities of Canadians.

We have a responsibility to spend money prudently and where it will do the most good. We must ensure that government programs are efficient, effective, and achieving the results that Canadians expect from us.

DFO is making steady progress in modernizing and improving our program and policy approaches to meet the needs of Canadians today and in the future.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, early this afternoon I will have the pleasure of opening debate on my private member's bill calling for an inquiry into the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery.

The Newfoundland and Labrador fishery rebuilding act proposes that today, 20 years after the shutdown of the commercial groundfish fishery, we begin the process of rebuilding. Unfortunately, the Conservative government appears to be sailing in the opposite direction.

Will the minister do the right thing and agree to an inquiry to restore the once great stocks that were our dowry with Confederation?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has learned many lessons from the poor practices that

had led to the collapse of the groundfish fishery in the 1990s. While some may prefer to live in the past, our government has no intention of conducting a formal review into the collapse of the cod fishery.

In some areas, for example, on the eastern shelf, we have seen some positive indicators that our efforts are starting to pay off, and we will continue with fisheries reform and further implementation of sustainability policies.

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is time for the minister to get a grip on reality. Fishers are worried about the cuts at Fisheries and Oceans Canada. People from the Gaspé and the Magdalen Islands have already suffered enough because of poor management of fish stocks. Now the government is adding to that by cuts in search and rescue. The industry's future and the fishers' safety are being threatened by these cuts.

Will the government commit to maintaining funding at Fisheries and Oceans Canada to guarantee the future of our fishers?

[English]

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I believe that our department and this government have made substantial gains in the fisheries. The programs that we are implementing will make the fishery more efficient, more effective, and better for fishers in the industry. Our programs, and those of search and rescue, are fully subscribed and are working well.

* * *

PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to media reports, the government now agrees that Quebec should retain its proportional representation in the House. This is what we Liberals insisted had to be changed from the previous plan. Why does the government now want Ontario to lose five seats and B.C. to lose two, while Alberta gains one?

Could the minister assure us that he will release his bill soon enough for the House to examine it in detail and will he release the population data which should be the basis for seat allocation?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as this House well knows, our government has made three distinct commitments. First, we have ensured, or have committed to ensure, that the faster growing provinces, both now and in the future, will see increased seat representation based on the population. Second, we have committed to ensure that our smaller provinces will be protected from losing any seats. Finally, we have committed to ensure fair and proportional representation in the province of Quebec according to its population.

Those are the commitments we have made and those are the commitments we will honour.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that mandatory minimum penalties remove a judge's discretionary power to determine an appropriate sentence based on the crime and the circumstances. Yesterday, the Quebec bar said that it would not allow Parliament to do that to our society.

Will the government stop wasting billions of dollars on an approach that is bound to fail and that will only lead to more crime, less justice and skyrocketing costs?

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian public gave us a mandate to protect them against violent young offenders. That is something new. All the measures in this legislation that aims to protect Canadians will respect the rights of young offenders and of Quebecers, and will also protect Canadian society against dangerous reoffenders. That is what we were asked to do and that is what we will do. We are asking for the support of the opposition.

* * *

•(1140)

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives thought they could get away with their anti-democratic attack on western Canadian family farms with no fuss. Funny how people react when the government ignores them.

Protests against the Conservative plan to kill the single desk system by farmers today in Saskatchewan will lead to more next week in the face of the government's false claims that farmers support its ideological plan. Farmers do not support killing small farms and small town economies.

Is the minister now planning to ignore their cries from the farms and streets of the Prairies?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this legislation would deliver on our government's long-standing commitment to bring marketing choice and freedom to western Canadian farmers. Once passed, the bill would allow prairie farmers to seek their own contracts for grains through the open market. The Wheat Board is going to remain a voluntary pooling option for Canadian farmers.

We hope that the opposition will not drag this out. We know that the chairman of the Wheat Board has said that he wants the opposition to drag it out which would completely disrupt the markets. That is totally irresponsible. We do not want to see that happen. We hope that the opposition is not going to join with that kind of irresponsibility.

We are looking out for prairie farmers. Would the opposition join with us in doing that?

Oral Questions

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency confirmed that the agency will face \$13 million in cuts next year. That is 43% of its budget gone. That is one-third of its staff gone. The agency's job is to look into potentially harmful policies and projects before they get the green light.

The government has abandoned environmental protection. How can the agency do its job properly with huge cuts to staff and programs?

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is taking concrete action to protect Canada's environment. With regard to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, budget 2007 provided \$11 million in additional funding for the agency to take on more responsibilities related to the review of major resource projects.

The agency was one of six departments funded to deliver on a new government mandate to improve the regulatory process for major resource projects. The funding was time limited so that the government could assess at the end of the five years whether it was generating the intended results. We look forward to the findings of this committee.

[Translation]

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency plays a crucial role. Investments worth \$500 million are planned for natural resource projects, yet this government is strangling the agency that oversees those projects. Now the agency's managers are worried about the amount of work that lies ahead.

Is the government's economic projection false? Or does the government prefer to let industry do what it wants without worrying about the environment?

[English]

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we provided additional funding to this agency in budget 2007. It was a five-year funding process, which we are reviewing right now and look forward to the committee's findings.

[Translation]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, EU nations are worried, and with good reason, about the environmental impact of the oil sands. While the minister prefers to do nothing, the gap between greenhouse gas emission reduction targets for 2020 and the reality is 75%.

Why is the minister not focusing his efforts on reaching those reduction targets instead of attacking the European Union's fuel quality directive?

Oral Questions

[English]

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, our first interest, of course, is in protecting the Canadian economy, Canadian jobs and the environment at the same time. We are committed to working with all levels of government and industry to ensure that the oil sands are developed in an environmentally and economically sustainable manner. It is a strategic resource in our country. Currently, 390,000 jobs are tied to and supported by oil sands development.

I wish the opposition would join with us in supporting Canadian jobs, supporting the Canadian economy and helping us move ahead in the future.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is no surprise that the government is in denial but the facts are clear. The government has failed to properly understand and regulate the environmental impacts of oil sands development. It has weakened its climate change targets by 90% since 2007 and its inaction has given Canada a black eye on the world stage.

When will the government take climate change seriously at home instead of attacking our allies abroad?

● (1145)

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, as I have said, we are protecting the Canadian economy and the Canadian environment.

One of the things that really concerns me is how the NDP members do not seem to be able to be united on any of these issues. We have heard them contradict each other on the shipbuilding process. We have heard them contradicting each other on the merit of Supreme Court justices. We have heard them contradict each other on marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. We have heard them contradict each other in terms of the merger with the Liberals.

The opposition does not have credibility on this issue. We will continue to represent Canada. We will continue to build the Canadian economy and we look forward to a bright future.

AIR CANADA

Mr. Mark Adler (York Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians remain concerned about air services and Air Canada plays a vital role in the Canadian economy. The Minister of Labour has referred this labour dispute to the Canada Industrial Relations Board.

Could the Minister of Labour please provide the House with an update on the status of this matter?

Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government remains supportive of free collective bargaining. We have always said that the best deal the parties will get are the ones they find themselves. That is why I am so pleased to announce today to all Canadians that Air Canada and the Canadian Union of Public Employees have negotiated a resolution to avoid a work stoppage and to maintain full service for passengers of Air Canada.

We congratulate both parties for their diligent efforts and their efforts at resolving the labour dispute and avoiding this work

stoppage. Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to protect the economic recovery of the country and that is exactly what we are doing.

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs has claimed over and over again that the G8 projects came in on budget. However, now we learn that projects in Huntsville came in at over \$5 million more than projected. Huntsville will need to raise its taxes to pay its part of the G8 slush fund.

How can the Conservatives say that the project came in on budget?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to announce to members of the House that of the 23,000 projects that this government funded under Canada's economic action plan, we did not pay one cent of money over budget.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, no matter how much the government insists that all expenses were justified, the fact remains that the President of the Treasury Board refused to provide all documentation to the Auditor General during her investigation. The three amigos—the minister, the mayor and the hotel manager—recommended projects without providing the necessary documentation.

Will the President of the Treasury Board commit to handing all documentation in his possession over to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Infrastructure Canada and the Government of Canada co-operated fully with the good work of the Auditor General.

Throughout her 10 years as Auditor General, Sheila Fraser did an outstanding job fighting for the interests of taxpayers. She came forward with a solid report, which made a good number of observations on how this government could do things better, on how this government could be more open and on how this government could be more transparent to Parliament. This government has accepted every one of her recommendations in this regard.

NORTHERN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are still trying to get a clear picture of what is going on at CanNor.

Oral Questions

First, we have an audit that shows that every financial rule in the book was broken. Then, the minister says that it is just a draft and that she is waiting for the final audit before acting. Then, the Prime Minister chimes in saying that all is fixed and there is nothing to worry about. Then, at the start of this week, the head of policy for the agency contradicted the Prime Minister when he told the natural resources committee that it was waiting for the final audit before acting.

So, which is it? Has the government fixed the problems or is it still waiting to find out what the problems are?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member opposite should have paid closer attention to the individuals from the north who are supporting our government in establishing a highway between Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk. Unfortunately, the member from Northwest Territories voted against our government's great initiative.

In regard to CanNor, we have already started to address the issues and to make improvements. Obviously, we accept all of the recommendations and we will address all of the recommendations.

Our government takes any indication of poor financial management by officials very seriously, and we are addressing it.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that obfuscation and passing the blame will really solve this issue.

Here is another problem. According to the agency's head of policy, all decisions are being made by the minister rather than by non-partisan public servants. These are financial decisions. My constituents tell me that the minister's in-box is overflowing with applications waiting for a decision.

While the minister dithers, economic development for the north is being delayed. When will the minister take up her responsibilities and get things going there?

•(1150)

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is responding to the needs of northerners through the many great initiatives of CanNor. We are processing applications as quickly as possible.

It is unfortunate that the member from Northwest Territories did not support the major investments by our government in establishing a highway between Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, which creates jobs for the north and opens up many opportunities for the north.

In terms of the CanNor audit, the audit was publicly released this week. If the member wishes to review that audit, he can go to the website. Our government is addressing all—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Kings—Hants.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives have fought and voted against every advancement of gay rights in Canada, from pension benefits to marriage to

transgender rights, and yet, yesterday, the Conservatives came out in support of the “It Gets Better” gay youth campaign.

If the Conservatives are now serious about helping gay youth, will they recognize the support that pride festivals provide to struggling young gays? Will the Conservatives restore the funding that they themselves cut for these important pride festivals across Canada?

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will reiterate the answer we gave earlier.

This government has provided extraordinary amounts of funding in the arts and culture sector across this country, and we are very proud to do so. In my own riding and in ridings across this country, festivals are being supported.

We get a lot of applications for a lot of different things. We support a lot of different cultural festivals in communities across Canada. We look at all of those applications on their merit and we support the ones that Canadians ask us to support and the ones that meet the criteria of the programs that we establish.

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ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government is slashing ACOA. Its budget has been cut by almost 40% from 2005 levels, which is stunning given that the Prime Minister stated in his 2006 campaign, “We’re going to maintain the budget for ACOA”. This is at a time when the ACOA minister is hiring defeated Conservative candidates at top rate salaries.

Would the minister table a list of all ACOA cuts and, along with that list, a list of individuals hired by ACOA since the Conservatives came into power?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave us a clear mandate to keep taxes low and balance our budget by 2014–15. ACOA has identified ways to make its internal services more efficient, for example, by reducing costs associated with travel and internal operations.

Over the next year, we will continue to cut the fat out of government. We will review all spending. We will review all hiring.

This government has done more for ACOA than the previous government, and we continue to support it.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government clearly lacks vision when it comes to immigration. Parents and grandparents have been waiting for years to join their families in Canada. Instead of examining all options to reunite family members living apart, the government has decided to limit the number of applications. That is unacceptable.

Why is this government insisting on imposing a limit on the number of claimants rather than searching for real solutions for family reunification?

[English]

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's question but it is a little premature at this point. A study is taking place at citizenship and immigration and it will take place over the next number of weeks. We are looking at all options, bringing in a number of witnesses.

In this country, over the last six years in government, we have averaged 254,000 new immigrants coming to this country to be settled. That is 14% higher than the previous administration. I do not think we need to take any advice or at least any lectures from the opposition on what it is to become a Canadian.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to families, the government just does not get it. Parents and grandparents are a vital support for families in Canada, not a burden on the system as some Conservatives suggest. Elderly family members provide child care and the family support that new Canadians need to enter the workforce. Since the government has failed to establish a national child care system, help from older relatives is more important than ever.

Why does the minister refuse to recognize the important contributions that immigrant seniors make to our communities?

• (1155)

Mr. Rick Dykstra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is not an immigration minister on this side of the House who has not stood up and ensured that we are up and working hard for seniors in this country. When we look at the averages over the last number of years, we are accepting new Canadians whether they are young or old.

What I would appreciate, while we are working through this process at the citizenship and immigration committee and while the minister is making the determination on how we deal with backlogs, that members would participate in a way that is meaningful and helpful, rather than just sitting on the other side of the House and criticizing.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this week, our government delivered on a long-standing promise to farmers by introducing the marketing freedom for grain farmers act. Unfortunately, factions allied with the old Canadian Wheat Board guard are working to destroy the rural

economy of the Prairies by opposing our bill. The actions being taken by these people and CWB chair, Allen Oberg, are disrupting what farmers need most, market certainty.

Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board explain how our government is improving the entire grain supply chain?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the marketing freedom for grain farmers act takes direct action to improve rail access for farmers and to provide market certainty.

First, the bill would guarantee farmers' rights to producer cars under the Canadian Grain Commission. Second, our government is implementing the rail freight service review. We are appointing a facilitator to improve those commercial relationships. Most important, this legislation would allow farmers the freedom to make their own shipping and marketing decisions.

Unfortunately, there are organizations in western Canada that have stood in the way of progress for years. It is no surprise they would be taking action and standing once again against the best interests of western Canadian producers.

However, our government is bringing marketing freedom to western Canadian farmers whether the opposition likes that or not.

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EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to plead the case of a lady who has been waiting two months for her employment insurance. She has been diagnosed with cancer. She is physically and emotionally exhausted, and now she is broke. Yesterday, she spent three hours phoning the Service Canada 800 number, only to get busy signals. When she finally got through, the agent told her that the office workload was unbearable.

I am sure the minister will commit to looking into this specific case. However, does she not see that the 600 jobs she is carving out of the Service Canada EI processing centres is making a bad situation impossible?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government sympathizes with that mother who is diligently fighting with cancer. Each case is assessed based on the current legislation and the payment of benefits. These will be evaluated for each individual situation.

Our government is currently reviewing the legislation to ensure the needs of Canadians are properly met under the program. We are modernizing and there will be no Service Canada offices closing and no impact on in-person services offered.

*Oral Questions***FORESTRY INDUSTRY**

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Goulard Lumber in Sturgeon Falls is losing its Quebec-based customers who are now buying cheaper lumber from Maine. Why? Because the black liquor subsidy from the U.S. government lets them undercut the price of Canadian producers.

Like in other companies across Canada, Goulard Lumber is not getting a fair deal from a government that worships free trade. When will the government adopt a forestry strategy that puts Canadians first and supports our communities?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite knows that our focus is the Canadian economy and creating jobs and economic growth. That is why we have taken unprecedented investments to support Canada's forestry industry. It has created results. More than 13,000 jobs have been created in the forestry sector. We have a 600% increase, for example, in softwood exports to China alone.

Our government is going to continue to support the forestry sector across Canada. It is an important part of continuing the economic growth that we have in this country.

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INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know that our government's top priority remains completing the economic recovery and creating jobs. With one in five Canadian jobs dependent on trade, a trade agreement with the European Union has the potential to benefit Canada enormously. These benefits include a 20% boost in bilateral trade, almost 80,000 new jobs, and an extra \$1,000 for the average Canadian family.

Could the parliamentary secretary please give the House an update on the status of our trade negotiations with the European Union?

• (1200)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Etobicoke Centre for his support for our job creating pro-trade plan.

Yesterday we announced the wrap-up of the ninth round of the comprehensive economic trade agreement with the European Union. The benefits from this trade agreement will be substantial. The hon. member mentioned them all: a 20% boost in bilateral trade, 80,000 new jobs, and nearly \$1,000 on average per Canadian family.

As we have done throughout negotiations, our government will continue to vigorously defend Canadian interests to ensure that this agreement—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs on the

urgency of getting the Commonwealth to address lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights. Remember, in 41 of 54 member states, being gay is still illegal. The prime minister of Britain and the Australian foreign minister have now spoken out strongly saying this issue must be on the agenda for the Commonwealth heads of government meeting.

Will the minister now make the same clear commitment and ensure that these basic human rights are a priority at the Commonwealth meetings next week in Perth?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, human rights will be front and centre at the Commonwealth summit next week in Perth, Australia. We will be considering the adoption of the report by the Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group, on which Senator Hugh Segal assisted, with nine other leaders in the Commonwealth.

The rights of gays and lesbians are tremendously important. It is completely unacceptable that homosexuality continues to be criminalized in a majority of Commonwealth countries. We will certainly take that issue to the summit.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Quebecers understand the importance of a free trade agreement with the European Union, but they are not prepared to accept just anything. They cherish the richness of their culture and obviously want to protect agricultural supply management, public services and water resources. The Conservatives are negotiating in a vacuum and are not giving the public any information. They are merely providing assurances, as the parliamentary secretary did earlier, that important progress is being made in key sectors, without providing any details. In short, we fear the devil is in the details.

Does the minister understand that the implications of this agreement are too important to keep Parliament and the public in the dark?

[English]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians know, farmers know, and the House knows our strong commitment to supply management. We promote supply management and we have defended it in our trade agreements. This is no different in our negotiations with the European Union.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**[*English*]**MENTAL HEALTH COMMISSION OF CANADA**

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table the 2010-11 annual report of the Mental Health Commission of Canada. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the commission for its work.

[*Translation*]**INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS**

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to table in the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian Branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie respecting its participation at the XXVIIth Regional Assembly and at the Conference of Branch Chairs of the Americas Region, held in Regina, Saskatchewan, from August 22 to 26, 2011.

[*English*]**ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT ACT**

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-332, An Act to change the name of the electoral district of Western Arctic.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce this bill again, although I really do not understand why, after six years, Parliament has not been able to pull together a consensus to do the work that should be done to honour Canadians with the proper appellation attached to each constituency.

My constituency, which lies between Nunavut and Yukon, is called the Western Arctic. The failure of the previous member of Parliament to change the name at the time of division means that my people do not have proper recognition in the House of Commons. This is really unfortunate. I would ask for the unanimous consent of all parties to recognize the people of the Northwest Territories correctly in Parliament.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

● (1205)

INVESTMENT CANADA ACT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-333, An Act to amend the Investment Canada Act (disclosure of undertakings and demands).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce my private member's bill, Bill C-333, An Act to amend the Investment Canada Act (disclosure of undertakings and demands). It is very much related to two other private members' bills I introduced earlier this month regarding the acquisition of Inco and Falconbridge in Sudbury.

When a foreign company takes over a Canadian company, it often must first make undertakings to Industry Canada to ensure that the acquisition will be a net profit to the country. Currently, these undertakings are confidential under the Investment Canada Act. I believe Canadians have the right to know what commitments a foreign company has made when it takes over a Canadian company, especially when it concerns our natural resources.

The bill would allow any Canadian citizen the right to request that these undertakings be made public. In light of recent events with Xstrata, Vale Inco and U.S. Steel, it is time for Parliament to introduce transparency and accountability to foreign takeover agreements.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

INVESTMENT CANADA ACT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-334, An Act to amend the Investment Canada Act (enhanced ministerial oversight).

He said: Mr. Speaker, again I am happy to reintroduce in the House my private member's bill, Bill C-334, An Act to amend the Investment Canada Act (enhanced ministerial oversight). I want to thank my colleague from Windsor West for allowing me to work on this file. This important legislation would provide substantive improvements to the Investment Canada Act. This bill is the culmination of consultations with stakeholders, experts, academics and labour organizations.

This bill among other things would: require the Minister of Industry to consult with representatives of industry and labour, provincial and local authorities, and other interested persons in exercising their powers under the Investment Canada Act; lower the threshold for ministerial review to \$100 million; invite submissions from interested parties; require sureties from non-Canadian investors; broaden the minister's consideration when evaluating net benefits; eliminate the prohibition against communications of information related to the investment; and extend the timetable for review from 45 to 90 days.

In other words, this bill would strengthen the Investment Canada Act to protect workers and their communities, something the Conservative government and previous Liberal governments have refused to do.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I am hopeful there will be unanimous consent for the following motion. I move, seconded by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, "That a take note debate on the subject of the ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and their institutions, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 take place on Tuesday, October 25, 2011".

The Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: No.

Routine Proceedings

● (1210)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place that the debate would be held on Monday, October 24.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I did say I was hopeful for unanimous consent because there were differing views on scheduling. I thought that with Tuesday everybody would be happy. I was hopeful that would be the case.

The Speaker: I ask the House if there is unanimous consent for the minister's motion.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No. 127.

[Text]

Question No. 127—**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan:**

With regard to the VIA Rail Guildwood Station: (a) what is the status on the decision to cut services; (b) when will this decision be made; (c) how many passengers frequent Guildwood station daily; (d) how many people are employed at Guildwood Station; (e) what criteria are being examined in the review of efficiencies in the passenger rail network; and (f) what is the government's reason for considering to cut services at Guildwood Station?

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), VIA systematically reviews its operations to ensure that it carries out its business in the most efficient way possible. Stations are regularly reviewed to ensure that the station personnel matches the demand at the stations. This will result in an increase in personnel at a specific station or a decrease in personnel. Currently there are no plans to close Guildwood Station.

With regard to (b), there are no plans to close Guildwood Station or reduce the services available at that stop at this time.

With regard to (c), in 2010, 37,686 passengers either got on or got off at Guildwood Station, or an average of 103 passengers per day.

With regard to (d), currently two full-time employees and one part-time employee work at Guildwood Station.

With regard to (e), when reviewing efficiencies in the passenger rail network, VIA's objective is to eliminate activities that do not add value for customers. VIA constantly reviews its personnel assigned to stations to ensure that the service matches demand.

With regard to (f), as a crown corporation, VIA is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the company. In its review of operating expenses, the corporation may decide to change a feature of its operations such as station stops. VIA then brings the proposed change to the minister for approval. No request was made by VIA to close the Guildwood station.

[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 121 and 122 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 121—**Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway):**

With respect to corporate tax revenue: (a) for each fiscal year from 1990-1991 to 2010-2011, what were the annual corporate tax revenues projected to be collected by the federal government in budgetary forecasting for one, two and three years in advance, broken down by year; (b) for each fiscal year from 1990-1991 to 2010-2011, what were the annual corporate tax revenues projected to be collected by each provincial and territorial government in budgetary forecasting for one, two and three years in advance, broken down by year and by province and territory; (c) for each fiscal year from 1990-1991 to 2010-2011, what were the annual corporate tax revenues actually collected by the federal government, broken down by year; (d) for each fiscal year from 1990-1991 to 2010-2011, what were the annual corporate tax revenues actually collected by each provincial and territorial government, broken down by year; (e) for each fiscal year from 1990-1991 to 2010-2011, what was the difference between projected and collected corporate tax revenues for the federal government and for each province and territory, broken down by year, and expressed as both a dollar figure and a percentage of projected revenue; (f) for the corporate tax revenue projections for the province of British Columbia for fiscal years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014, what adjustments were made to those projections between August 2010 and October 2010; and (g) what new information, new data, or new modeling was received or used that resulted in adjustments to the corporate tax revenue projections for the province of British Columbia between August 2010 and October 2010 for fiscal years 2011-2012, 2012-2013, and 2013-2014?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 122—**Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway):**

With respect to the federal funding for Child Advocacy Centres announced in October 2010: (a) does the funding for this initiative come from an existing fund or is it a new initiative with new funding; (b) what are the criteria by which applications to receive funding under this initiative will be evaluated; (c) how many applications for funding under this initiative have been received, broken down by month received, location of project and name of applicant; (d) how many applications for funding under this initiative have been approved, broken down by date approved, location of project and name of applicant; (e) how many applications for funding under this initiative have been rejected, broken down by date rejected, location of project and name of applicant; (f) is there a prescribed limit to the amount of funds that can be disbursed under this initiative within a single fiscal year; (g) is there a prescribed limit to the amount of funds that can be disbursed to a single applicant or project; (h) what happens to this initiative once the \$5.25 million has been fully assigned; (i) what will happen to the funding once the five year commitment comes to an end; (j) what factors or circumstances changed between the time of the requests made by former Victims Ombudsman Steve Sullivan to include funding for Child Advocacy Centres in Budget 2009 and Budget 2010 and the time the government announced funding in October 2010; (k) what existing programs or initiatives may have their funding or potential funding reduced or eliminated as a result of the announced funding for Child Advocacy Centres; (l) what specific branch, department or agency is responsible for administering the funding for Child Advocacy Centres; and (m) what is the legislative basis for this funding?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Translation]

COPYRIGHT MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou has eight minutes to finish his speech.

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I was saying earlier, imagine the wonderful smell of buttered toast, smothered in honey, wafting through our offices. Obviously, that makes us think that the machine I described is a marvel. However, it is relatively expensive to purchase. A few hundred dollars, but we can pay a price per piece or buy a subscription to get toast at a fraction of the cost of the traditional way. That obviously makes this new machine more attractive, since any honest, hard-working individual will jump at the chance to improve his life for a low price.

That being said, not everyone agrees with this new approach to breakfast and some people refuse to buy the appliance and stick to their traditional methods. However, this innovation becomes quite successful and is sold across the country. This revolutionary device shakes up our morning habits and causes major changes that affect the stakeholders in the traditional bread industry. We have to tell it like it is: our wheat farmers are not compensated for the process to duplicate the real wheat in our fields. Initially, the appliance is not seen as a threat because no one could imagine anything replacing real bread, but the astounding success of the new machine results in lost markets for the wheat farmers. After a high-profile court case, the farmers' legitimate calls for a fair price for their wheat are dismissed. That same wheat remains absolutely necessary in the duplication process created by the innovative company that is now an industrial giant.

That is not the worst of it. The government takes the side of the company in question and, in a supreme act of bad faith, describes the legitimate royalties the farmers are seeking for their wheat as a consumer tax. Our wheat farmers do not have the means to stand up to this powerful and dishonest propaganda and are forced to continue fighting rearguard actions with limited means, hoping to find allies in the public or among other groups in order to reverse the trend.

There you have a story to illustrate the major technological changes we are experiencing—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry, but I must interrupt the hon. member.

The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons wishes to speak.

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker. I apologize to the hon. member for the interruption. However, there have been further discussions among the parties and now I am much more confident that you will find unanimous consent for the following motion: That a take note debate on the subject of the ongoing violence and vicious

attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and their institutions, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1, take place on Tuesday, October 25.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of this motion. Is there unanimous consent for the hon. member to present the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

• (1215)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I will forgive the hon. member for the interruption since that is also a very important issue.

I would now like to continue. As I was saying, this story helps us to understand the major technological changes that the world is experiencing and what our creators stand to lose if Bill C-11 is passed as is.

Creators must not have their works expropriated, as the wheat farmers in my riding have had the fruits of their labour expropriated; this must be avoided at all costs. And we are not even talking about the impact such action would have on the entire creation-related production system, which involves a very large number of people. Today, I would like to set the record straight and put things into perspective.

First, it is important to understand that, contrary to popular belief, artists are not rolling in money. As some other hon. members have mentioned, according to the figures for 2009-10, the average income of an artist in Canada is less than \$13,000 a year, which is below the poverty line.

According to a 2008 report by the Conference Board of Canada, the cultural sector generated approximately \$25 billion in tax revenue in 2007 at all levels of government. That is three times higher than the \$7.9 billion that was invested in culture by all levels of government in 2007. If an investment yields three times its cost, I do not see what is preventing the government from supporting this industry in every way possible. How can anyone claim that artists are dependent on government handouts when their creativity contributes to the country's economic and cultural prosperity?

I would be remiss if I did not mention the many economic benefits generated by creators. The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists estimates that the arts and culture industries in Canada contribute \$85 billion a year to our economy. I would like to remind the members of this House that this amount represents over 7% of Canada's gross national income. That is over a million jobs in the Canadian economy. These industries and the jobs that depend on them can survive only in an environment where intellectual property is protected.

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It is worth taking a moment to talk about what the government calls the iPod tax. Several times now, the government has described extending the private copying exception to include digital audio recorders, which the NDP supports, as an iPod tax. The tax could cost Canadian consumers up to \$75 per device, the Conservatives said. Does it not seem a little ridiculous to imagine artists and authors taxing consumers, who are their bread and butter? Quite the opposite, the Conservatives' copyright bill, Bill C-11, will ultimately increase the current levies on cassettes, CDs and DVDs. To use the language that the Conservatives themselves are using, this would be like a tax on those products.

Another important point deserves our attention for a moment. Bill C-11 creates an artificial distinction between copying for private use and reproducing for private use. It does not propose adding any new digital storage media to the existing private copying system, but it protects the system in its current state. Nothing could be further from the truth, since the scope of the levies would be determined by the Canadian Copyright Board, a government agency under the supervision of the industry minister. This kind of control would make authors take a back seat, and it would be somewhat worrisome to see the minister have that kind of arbitrary power.

The Conservatives ignored the opinion of the experts who appeared in committee and the conclusions of their own consultations on copyright held in 2009. It is absurd. As a result, they have introduced a bill that could do more harm than good. In addition to introducing a new control mechanism wielded by a single minister, this government did not take expert opinions on the matter into account.

In conclusion, I invite my colleagues to remain vigilant. The NDP believes that Canada's copyright laws can strike a balance between the rights of creators to obtain fair compensation for their work and the rights of consumers to have reasonable access to content.

•(1220)

We need to pay attention to creators. Wanting to tax consumers shows a complete lack of understanding of the reality facing authors.

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have a clear understanding on this side of the House, but for the opposition, much of the problems with the bill stems from the fact that they do not see that we are taxing Canadians enough. I think we have a clear picture of that.

However, would the member comment on the unique part of the bill which talks about "notice and notice" for our Internet service providers so we can better protect copyright owners from those who seek to poach their work and does he support that provision in the bill?

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for asking this question.

This really is one of the regrettable aspects of this debate and others as well. Unfortunately, we argue too easily over details. All the New Democratic Party is asking for, in this debate as well as

others, is to be able to discuss these questions openly and thoroughly.

Unfortunately, despite this government's openness to receiving proposals, all of ours were categorically rejected. I hope that the hon. member will listen to me and that we can speak openly.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for the striking way he is approaching this issue.

I would like to carry on with his analogy. In terms of his machine, it seems to me that it is a question of modernization, as opposed to creation. Usually, when a machine is created, engineers are called in to help, but when it comes time to modify it, I would think it important to consult with those who actually use the machine.

In the case of Bill C-11, are there associations of creators in Quebec or Canada that seem to support the government?

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for praising my creative talents. I truly enjoyed using them.

So far there has been no representation from the creators in support of this bill. It is a shame that in this situation, and in others, it is the major conglomerates, the major power holders that have the upper hand. It is the property holders—Sony, Apple and other corporations—that have ample means to defend themselves. Obviously we have to provide a regulatory framework to protect their interests, but creators are also calling for this same right. We wonder why the government is denying them that right.

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, could the member elaborate on the economic contributions he sees from the indirect jobs? I know many of our communities have those indirect jobs in the arts and culture industry.

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

Yesterday, I had the honour of receiving farmers from across the country. They told me all about the spinoffs of farming activities. The same thing applies to the arts. It is quite extraordinary to see the economic contribution made by creators through the many partnerships they bring to the table and the massive multiplier effect that results. I am talking about two, three and four times the level of government investment. Sometimes it is almost 10 times the investment when we talk about general economic activity.

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● (1225)

[English]

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to add my voice to this debate. What we are dealing with in the House at this moment is an amendment to Bill C-11 suggesting that what we should be doing is essentially striking the bill. The amendment says that the House would decline to give a second reading. I believe part of the reason for the amendment is that this piece of legislation fails to deal with the concerns raised in connection with previous versions of the bill; this is not the first time that the House has seen some attempt to amend the Copyright Act.

With regard to Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act, I know listeners are interested in why we are talking about complex issues. The legislative summary discusses copyright law in Canada. It says:

Copyright is a legal term describing rights given to creators for their literary and artistic works. Copyright attaches to an original work that is fixed in some material form. In other words, copyright protects the expression of an idea or intellectual creation; it does not protect the idea itself.

It also says:

The Act affords the author of a work the right to authorize or prohibit certain uses of his or her work and to receive compensation for its use. The purpose of the Act, like that of other pieces of intellectual property legislation, is to protect copyright owners while promoting creativity and the orderly exchange of ideas.

New Democrats, the member for Timmins—James Bay and the member for Jeanne-Le Ber, have very ably raised the point that we absolutely need an amendment to the copyright laws we currently have in Canada. Everyone agrees that we need an amendment, but as other members have pointed out, the devil is in the details.

New Democrats have consistently proposed that copyright laws in Canada can balance the right of the creators to be compensated fairly for their work and the right of consumers to have reasonable access to content. We have proposed amendments to the bill that would create a fair royalty system for artists, because as it stands right now, the proposed legislation will actually wipe away millions of dollars in revenue for artists. This has a profound effect not only on the artists' ability to continue to create and contribute, but also on our communities and our economic well-being. I will touch on that in a minute.

The proposed Copyright Modernization Act essentially gives with one hand while it takes away with the other. While the bill contains a few concessions for consumers, they are unfortunately undermined by the government's refusal to compromise on the single most controversial copyright issue in this country, digital lock provisions.

In the case of long-distance education, for example, people in remote, isolated communities would have to burn their school notes after 30 days; this is hardly an improvement or an appropriate use of copyright laws. I was formerly the aboriginal affairs critic, and we understand that the only way for many aboriginal communities to have access to a more balanced education system is through the Internet. Students simply need a reasonable parity of time to access material that is so essential toward their becoming important and productive members of the future labour force.

New Democrats have proposed removing the sections of the copyright modernization bill that would make criminals out of

everyday Canadians who break digital locks for personal non-commercial use. We support the lessening of penalties for those who are responsible for breaking copyright laws; this would prevent the excessive use of lawsuits against ordinary citizens, which has been problematic in the United States. There were extensive copyright consultations in 2009, and the bill that has been reintroduced from the former bill simply has disregarded that extensive consultation.

I want to turn for a moment to the economics around copyright. This is the reason it is so essential for us get this piece of legislation right. Many of our communities have a vibrant community of writers, singer-songwriters, theatrical producers, cinematographers, and producers of Internet media, and many communities derive a substantial benefit from these creative activities.

A couple of years ago, the Conference Board of Canada did an extensive report on the contribution that arts and culture make to our communities. I want to quote from the report, because it illustrates why it is important that we get it right and why New Democrats have been so very adamant that what the Conservatives have proposed simply does not fix some of the problems before us.

● (1230)

Chapter 1 is entitled “Valuing Arts and Culture as Cornerstones of the Creative Economy”.

The chapter summary says in part:

In a dynamic environment of global competition, demographic change, and migration, Canada's culture sector plays a critical role in attracting people, businesses, and investment; stimulating creativity and innovation; and distinguishing Canada as an exciting place where people can celebrate their heritage and achieve personal and professional fulfillment.

The first chapter of the report goes on to discuss:

...the value to Canada of the *culture sector* as an economic engine, a magnet for talent, and a catalyst for prosperity.

We often hear in this House about how important it is for what we do here to contribute toward overall economic growth. What the Conference Board of Canada is laying out is a framework describing how the culture sector, beyond just the very fact of culture, is part of what is creating that innovation and that prosperity.

The report goes on to state:

Traditionally, the culture sector has been recognized for its multi-faceted role in contributing to individual and community development, social cohesion, and quality of life; however, in recent decades there has been growing understanding and examination of the substantial economic contributions of arts and culture industries and of their central role in the *creative economy*.

The report goes on to talk about what the creative economy is, and since I only have 10 minutes, I cannot get into the details of that. However, I know, for example, from talking with some of major software developers that it has been very important for the software development industry to be able to tap into that creative community to enhance their product. That is another sideline that the creative community often plays.

Now we can talk about dollars and cents. This is an overview of the economic contribution. I am only going to read a small part of it. It says:

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The economic footprint of the culture sector is much larger, when accounting for combined direct, indirect, and induced effects. The Conference Board calculates this full contribution as valued at \$84.6 billion, about 7.4 per cent of total real GDP, in 2007.

It goes on to say:

Considering the effect of culture industries on other sectors of the economy, including direct, indirect, and induced effects combined, culture and related industries employed over 1.1 million people in 2007.

However, there is a discrepancy in this, and the Conference Board of Canada goes on to point this out. Many people feel that sometimes people in these creative industries make big bucks. Contrary to that, it specifically cites artists. The report states:

In the case of artists, for example, despite the fact that 41 per cent of artists have a university degree, a certificate, or a diploma—almost double the rate of 22 per cent for the overall labour force—average earnings remain relatively low at \$23,500 per year.

It is important to raise that point because of the complexity of the copyright legislation. One of the goals of copyright is to ensure that artists are adequately compensated for the work they do. If we fail to do that, we already have some components of the culture sector who are seriously underpaid for what they do, so we want to ensure they are compensated.

Many of us could get up in this House and talk about the importance of culture at the local level in our ridings. My riding is a great example. A number of years ago, the town of Chemainus was struggling because its major employer, the sawmill, shut down. The town of Chemainus reinvented itself and became known as the town of murals. Chemainus is now a vibrant artistic community that not only has these magnificent murals on the walls but has also generated a whole series of other activities. In addition, the town of Chemainus has a very good theatre company, and people come from all over the island to attend its productions.

In the town of Duncan, every July we have a folk festival that brings in singers and songwriters. This provides a venue for, particularly, new and emerging Canadian artists to perform and engage in other creative activities with other artists from across the country, and sometimes from afar as well.

The city of Nanaimo has a very vibrant theatre culture, and of course Gabriola is awash with world-renowned songwriters and performers. Bob Bossin is only one of many. A recent arts tour on Thanksgiving weekend highlighted the diversity of the arts culture on Gabriola.

I will conclude by saying that this is a very important piece of legislation that we need to get right in order to protect not only consumers but also producers of arts and culture in our country. I would strongly urge all members to take this bill back to some basics and get it right.

• (1235)

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague's very eloquent exploration of the bill is greatly appreciated.

This country has enjoyed a massive burst of popularity due to the work that groups like Arcade Fire are expressing. Their ability to do their job is predicated on the fact that they do not have to literally go to McDonald's and flip burgers to make ends meet.

Could my hon. colleague comment on what losing this kind of income would mean to the creative capacity of our artists?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, that question is fundamental to part of what we should be talking about.

We often hear in this current economic climate about how important it is that we support job creation and that we support good-paying jobs. I would argue that as the arts and culture community is fundamental to so many of our communities, it is very important that we protect artists' rights to make a decent living.

That romantic notion of starving artists living in garrets to produce their great works does not retain much romance when they have to pay their bills at the end of the day. What we want is a thriving arts and culture community that can pay its bills.

Another colleague talked about the multiplier effect. The arts and culture sector is an enormous contributor to many of our communities. People see the finished product and think that is all we are dealing with. However, they are not talking about all the suppliers for the painters. They are not talking about the people who provide the framing of those goods.

I could go on about the economic contribution that arts and culture makes, but in the context of this particular bill, we need to ensure that we do the job of protecting both the consumer and the producer.

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, it was interesting that one point the member made was that at the very least we are able to have this debate and that the opposition, the official opposition in this case, is prepared to go to committee to hear from more witnesses. We spent a lot of time in the last Parliament on this matter. We have spent a lot of time in a number of Parliaments on it. All of us have probably reviewed some of the testimony we heard at committee, and it is gratifying to know that one part of the opposition is prepared to hear more testimony and hear from more Canadians.

I wonder if she might comment on some of the provisions in the bill that deal specifically with PVRs and time shifting, which would allow Canadians to no longer live in fear of how they watch their TV. I wonder if she would also comment on the notice and notice provisions that we have put in the bill with respect to Internet service providers.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Madam Speaker, I think what the parliamentary secretary has raised in his questions is the very complexity of this particular piece of legislation. He is quite correct. In previous Parliaments, we did have committee hearings dealing with various aspects of this bill, and I was just looking for the direct quote on the legislative summary.

However, what we found in previous committee hearings was, in effect, that there was no consensus about how to deal with some of these issues. The reason New Democrats are supporting having this go back to committee is to deal with some of those very complex issues that are not currently reflected in the bill, in the hope that we can amend the bill to better reflect what we believe Canadians are telling us.

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I look forward to future discussions on this particular piece of legislation, because it is very important that we engage in copyright reform in our country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Conservatives have once again introduced a bill to modernize the Copyright Act.

Bill C-11 is identical to the previous copyright legislation introduced by the Conservative government in the last Parliament. Copyright modernization has been needed for a long time, especially with the advent of new technologies. The new legislative amendments would adapt Canadian rules to take into account new technologies and would also harmonize them with current international standards. This is a very complex issue because it involves the demands of stakeholders in artistic communities, universities, the technology sector, business and consumer protection groups.

This bill will create powerful new anti-circumvention rights for content owners, preventing access to copyrighted works. This will result in a situation where digital locks will practically trump all other rights, including fair dealing for students and journalists.

This gives rise to a number of problems that I would like to highlight. First, there is the danger of creating situations where consumers will not be allowed to use content for which they have already paid. Although the bill contains some concessions for consumers, they are undermined by the government's refusal to reach a compromise on the most contentious copyright issue in Canada: the provisions regarding digital locks. Many stakeholders from the areas concerned believe that digital locks are completely obsolete and that only a few industries, such as the video game and computer software industries, still use such protection.

Although the Conservative government continues to say that the proposed changes to the Copyright Act will protect the best interests of Canadian consumers, the reality is that the Conservatives have based their policy on the concerns of large copyright holders, especially those in the United States. The real winners with Bill C-11 are the major movie studios and record labels, and not Canadian consumers.

Recent information published by WikiLeaks also demonstrates that the main copyright owners in the United States conspired with the Conservatives regarding Canada's Copyright Act. One of the most worrying WikiLeaks revelations is that a key staff member under the industry minister at the time encouraged the United States to put Canada on their piracy watch list in order to pressure Parliament to pass new legislation that would weaken the rights of Canadian consumers.

I would also like to point out that digital locks supersede all other rights set out in the act. That includes changing the format for someone who is visually impaired, for example. The goal is to allow recording companies and movie studios to protect their declining capacity to generate profit.

These new provisions would require that, if a digital lock has been used, copies made for education purposes must automatically be erased in five days and class notes be destroyed within 30 days of the course ending. That will have serious consequences for students who

take distance-education courses. When it comes to distance education, for example, the provisions in the new bill mean that people living in a remote community will have to burn their class notes 30 days after downloading them. That is not an improvement on the current situation and it is not an appropriate use of the copyright regulations.

I should point out that the Conservatives talk about fair dealing for purposes of education, but this is not defined in the legislation. Anyone can make a claim for this kind of use. For example, in Quebec, an agreement signed in 1982 between the educational sector and the collectives such as Copibec allows for certain products from authors and artists to be copied, in exchange for compensation. However, the Conservatives' Bill C-11 would encroach upon this agreement. This would lead to an estimated loss of \$10 million. There is a lot of uncertainty about what teachers can do with these works. I should point out that a society that wants to expand its knowledge must regularly quote authors who are well educated and who are behind the creation of new knowledge that allows our society to advance and develop.

• (1240)

The compromise provisions in Bill C-11 would officially include current grey area practices, for example, practices that allow users to record television shows to watch later, provided that they do not create a library of recorded content, as well as practices that allow a user to transfer musical works from a CD to an MP3 player and make backups. The bill will also create new exceptions to the Copyright Act for fair dealing, including exceptions for teachers and for parody and satire. The exceptions in Bill C-11 are among the most controversial elements of the new bill. The long and complex list of exceptions does not adequately recognize the rights of creators. In fact, these exceptions create new means for consumers to access protected content without also creating new ways to compensate creators for the use of their work.

With this bill, the Conservatives have intentionally avoided addressing the question of a possible extension of the private copying exception. An exception for private copying has been very effective in the past concerning cassettes, DVDs and CDs. The NDP agrees that the Copyright Act needs to be modernized, but we feel that this bill has too many glaring problems. In some cases, it even creates new problems where there were none before.

Government Orders

The NDP wants to and is willing to amend the bill so that it better reflects the interests of Canadian authors and consumers. We in the NDP strongly believe that changes to copyright in Canada can strike a balance between creators' rights to be fairly compensated for their work and consumers' rights to have reasonable access to content. For the benefit of the various stakeholders, we need to create a fair system of royalties for artists. This bill grants several new privileges concerning access to content, but it does not provide any new ways to pay artists. In its current state, this bill deprives artists of several million dollars in revenue. The Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists estimates that Canada's arts and culture industries contribute \$85 billion per year to our economy, which represents 7.4% of Canada's GNI, and support some 1.1 million jobs, or about 6% of the Canadian labour force. These industries and the jobs that depend on them can only survive in an environment where intellectual property is protected.

Despite the important contribution made by these industries, according to the figures for 2009-10, the average income of an artist in Canada is \$12,900 a year. The money the artist invests in production must also be subtracted from this amount. As a result, artists make an average annual income of approximately \$8,000.

It appears that all efforts to reform the Copyright Act in Canada in recent years have had very little to do with creating a system that balances the rights of creators and those of the public. Rather, these efforts seem to be attempts to meet the demands of large content owners in the United States, such as movie studios, recording companies and video game developers.

We are therefore proposing to delete from the copyright modernization bill the clauses that criminalize the removal of digital locks for personal, non-commercial purposes. We support shorter sentences for those found guilty of violating the Copyright Act because this would prevent excessive recourse to litigation against individuals, a situation that is problematic in the United States.

Furthermore, the legal uncertainty surrounding the terms "fair dealing for the purpose of education" and "reasonable grounds" will lead creators to take legal action against users. A court decision can take years and such procedures will be extremely costly for both creators and users, and will result in costs that are higher than the penalties set out in the bill. The Conservatives have ignored the opinions of the experts heard in committee and the findings of their own copyright consultations in 2009.

As a result, they have introduced a bill that could do more harm than good. This bill will violate creators' rights and compromise our ability to compete in the digital realm of the world economy. Losses for all Canadian creators are estimated at \$126 million.

• (1245)

That is why, although the NDP firmly believes that it is high time to update the Copyright Act, we cannot support this bill, which has too many obvious problems. Contrary to the Conservatives, we in the NDP will work hard to amend the bill—

• (1250)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must interrupt the hon. member. He could perhaps finish his comments during the period for questions and comments.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, I hate to keep pointing out the obvious, but the opposition has again pointed out that the best way to solve a lot of the copyright issues is to tax Canadians more. This is not something that we on this side of the House are contemplating.

Could my colleague discuss a bit the provisions of the bill which make it an infringement to induce or to enable others to steal the work of artists, such as movies, sound recordings and video games? Does the hon. member agree with those provisions in the bill that would protect those artists? Is that one of the sections that not only he but the rest of the members in his caucus will support?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, compensation for artists' work cannot be considered a tax. In the past, there were levies placed on every blank CD and cassette tape sold. This allowed people to record music. It is important for authors to receive royalties for their products. With the new iPods, everything is downloaded for free. People think that they have the right to do so, when that is obviously not the case. It is important for artists to be compensated for their work.

When an iPod is produced, everyone is paid: the iPod manufacturer, the box manufacturer and the packaging manufacturer. Everyone is compensated. This product is designed to hold music. But the artist who created the music is not compensated. It is completely absurd to encourage such a situation. Yes, we must prevent people from downloading for free, but we must also compensate the artists who produce these works.

[English]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Madam Speaker, we hear the word tax being thrown around a lot in this conversation.

I come from an area which benefits from the use fees that are attributed to intellectual property. What is being looked for is use fees. If someone uses a product, then that individual should pay for that product.

My colleague brought up the fact that the people who created the iPod are paid. Patent holders, which is a type of copyright, hold a number of patents on various aspects of the iPod and other MP3 players and they are paid with each unit they have sold.

Why is it so hard to understand that the creators of the content that goes on to these patented objects should want to be paid as well? Why is it referred to as a tax because of that? Could my colleague elaborate on that?

Government Orders

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: I thank my colleague for his question. A fee for use cannot be considered a tax. Creators produce music, which is available on the Internet. People think that they can download it for free and put it on their MP3 players. Everyone was paid for the MP3 player, the product that plays the music—even the manufacturer of the paper and packaging. Everyone was paid, but the artist who created the work that users put on their iPods is not. That is completely absurd and we cannot allow that. Artists must be compensated for their work. We cannot consider that to be a tax. My colleague is absolutely right: it is not a tax; it is a fee for use.

•(1255)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor.

I have the honour of rising today in the House to debate Bill C-11. As we all know, the purpose of this bill is to update the Copyright Act, which has not been changed in a number of years, in order to take the new digital technologies into account. We commend the fact that the government has finally decided to address this matter and we support the efforts to update the Copyright Act if they are geared toward justice and fairness.

The government could have taken this opportunity to resolve copyright-related problems, but instead it has once again demonstrated its narrow ideology by introducing a bill that satisfies American interests more than Canadian interests.

Last year, during the study of former Bill C-32, more than 200 submissions and proposals were made in committee, and each party offered criticism to improve this bill. These submissions and proposals gave us a better idea of the needs of our authors, creators and consumers. Unfortunately, the Conservatives have once again ignored Canadians. They are so arrogant as to brag about not having made any changes, since they prefer to get their orders from Washington.

I could ask why the Conservatives are ignoring these many in-depth consultations that were held in Parliament, but we already know the answer: for the Conservatives there is no room for reason, facts and evidence. This government insists on introducing these bills despite the many voices that speak out against them every time. This bill has a significant number of deficiencies that fail to serve either users or the authors.

Let us begin with the new rights and new exceptions with regard to fair dealing, especially for the purpose of education. A number of writers and publishers are strongly opposed to these exemptions, as they fear their works will be reproduced and distributed freely to students, which will result in lost income for them and constitutes, to some extent, an expropriation of their rights.

This is particularly problematic in Quebec and various franco-phone communities in Canada, given that, because of demographics, there is only a small pool of potential buyers.

Of course, a number of academic institutions support education exemptions because it will mean considerable savings and they will be able to use audiovisual products more often to facilitate student learning.

Creators live off their works and should be compensated when these works are used. A balanced bill would take the needs of creators and educational institutions into account, but this bill is not balanced and in no way compensates for the losses that certain authors will face. We are also asking the government to help artists adjust to the new digital reality and for transitional funding to help artists compensate for lost revenue resulting from the abolition of ephemeral recording rights, for example.

Another provision that we find extremely worrisome concerns digital locks. Bill C-11 introduces new rules for reproducing copyright-protected works for personal use but negates those rights by making it illegal to bypass a digital lock.

Someone who buys a DVD and wants to transfer its contents to a digital tablet, such as the Canadian PlayBook or the American iPad, will not be able to do so if the DVD has a digital lock. As we all know, various electronic media are making increased use of these locks to fight piracy and theft.

•(1300)

Therefore, the use of purchased works will be limited and buyers will be considered criminals if they break the lock in order to copy the work for personal use. This government will punish people who have legally obtained a work by limiting the ways they can use it and making criminals of those who want to use their legitimate purchase as they wish.

However, pirates have full use of the works they obtain illegally and will be considered just as guilty as someone who breaks a digital lock. Knowing how easy it is today for Internet users to illegally download works, pirated copies may appeal more to young Canadians than copies limited by a digital lock.

For example, why would a young person want to purchase a DVD if he cannot legally use the content on other platforms, whereas he could use a pirated copy, which is easy to obtain, as he sees fit? Bill C-11 is contradictory because, on the one hand, it allows copying of copyrighted material for personal use and, on the other, it prevents users from breaking locks that prohibit copying.

The provisions of this bill concerning digital locks are among the most restrictive in the world and cancel out the new personal use rights. This will ensure that, once again, Canadian users will be the losers. We must allow digital locks to be circumvented as long as it is for lawful and personal use.

Government Orders

It is not just political parties who are opposed to this bill. The Union des écrivaines et des écrivains québécois, the National Assembly of Quebec, the Fédération des commissions scolaires du Québec, the Association des libraires du Québec and many other groups have all publicly raised their concerns about this bill. As usual, this government is stubbornly ignoring Canadian interests. It prefers to address American interests under the pretext that it can do as it sees fit because it has a majority.

In fact, diplomatic cables clearly show that the Conservatives want to impose these restrictive measures as a result of pressure from the Americans. Once again, the Conservatives have decided to kowtow to the United States, which may try to impose its will on Canada more and more frequently, knowing that Canada will do what it asks without any opposition. It is high time that this government understood that it was elected by Canadians, not Americans, and high time that it started standing up for our people's rights rather than for the interests of American industries.

Many artists also spoke of their desire to have a resale right added to the bill to allow them to claim the revenue that they are currently losing. The government did not take this request into account, demonstrating once again that it does not care about the real and legitimate needs of creators, unless perhaps those creators are American.

Yes, the Liberal Party supports the modernization of the Copyright Act, but not in the form in which it has been presented to us today by this government. The bill is not balanced and does not pay enough attention to the needs of creators and consumers. The Conservative Party should have taken into account the many consultations pertaining to Bill C-32, which were held during the previous Parliament, rather than reintroducing an old bill that has not been changed despite the many amendments proposed. This government must stop ignoring the interests of Canadians and start standing up for them. It must stop doing nothing and amend this bill in order to address its many shortcomings.

• (1305)

[English]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from across the way for his presentation. I listened intently to what he said and I do have to question him though.

There are many groups across the country that support this legislation because it does get tough on IP crimes. That ensures that people who produce work, the creators, are protected.

For example, the Entertainment Software Association of Canada supports the bill. It said:

By deterring those who profit and benefit from stealing creator's work, this legislation will help provide a framework for the digital marketplace and allow creators and companies to distribute their works in the manner that best suits them.

A further quote:

We strongly support the principles underlying this bill and look forward to working with Members of Parliament to adopt any technical changes needed to ensure the bill fully reflects those principles and avoid unintended consequences.

In addition, the Canadian Anti-Counterfeiting Network said:

We're pleased that the government is committed to getting tough on IP crimes. Piracy is a massive problem in Canada which has a tangible economic impact on

government revenue, legitimate retailers, rights holders and consumers. It's extremely difficult for legitimate retailers to compete with those who abandon all ethics as they steal and rip.

This is supported by creators across the country. I ask the member of the opposition to get behind the bill as well.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Madam Speaker, the member just read a quote that one of the associations is in favour of the bill, except it would like to see amendments. That is what we are doing. The Liberal Party is making amendments. We are ready to put the amendments forward now. If the government accepts our amendments, the bill is done and it is passed.

What does it take for the government to listen? What part of the quotes does he not understand? That is what I do not understand. It is in the quote. We are ready to work with the government, to make amendments. The Liberal Party is making amendments. They are ready, let us go, let us pass this bill. Make the amendments. It is not complicated.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am always stunned by the Conservatives' comments.

[English]

They say that Canadians all over the country support this bill.

[Translation]

They have a talent for always referring to the only doughnut that everyone wants from the dozen, and passing over the 11 doughnuts that no one wants. That is always the Conservative way.

I would like to ask my Liberal colleague if he has any idea of the number of signatories from the Canada Council—which has nearly 80 organizations that are against this bill.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. He is a new member, so perhaps he is not aware that, during the previous session, there were over 200 people. This bill has been before us for about two weeks and everyone thought it would be amended. Everyone was a little reluctant. To date, there are perhaps 80 signatories, but I am sure there will be over 200, for we continue to receive emails every day from people who want to modernize the bill, but on the condition that the current bill is amended.

As I said to my Conservative colleague, I do not know what it will take to convince the government. Maybe if we were American they would listen to us. I do not know how this is going to work out. On our side, we are ready. We have proposed amendments. If the bill were amended, we could pass it right away.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville may ask a brief question.

Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. We know that the average income of artists in Canada is quite low—less than \$13,000 a year. It seems to me we should be helping these artists, encouraging them and trying to increase their income a bit.

Government Orders

I would like the hon. member to say a few words about this bill to explain how it is contrary to what we should be doing and how we can help these artists.

•(1310)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. The hon. member talked about a sum of \$13,000 a year, but that was just the average. There is an artist named Céline Dion who earns more than \$1 billion. It is her salary that raises the average because 80% of artists earn less than \$10,000 a year. That is the problem.

How can we help them? We can create a separate fund. There are a number of ways to do so. We can work together. We have already held a number of meetings during the last Parliament. We can help bring the new parliamentarians up to speed. There are a great number of ways to help artists. They do enough lobbying. We all know artists. We are here for them.

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Madam Speaker, as we know, copyright is a complicated issue and features competing demands from different stakeholders. We have artistic, academic, business, technology and consumer rights that we need to balance.

I am pleased to speak to this bill because just a few years ago I did not actually know very much about copyright. I was invited to participate in a panel discussion and a movie viewing. I was invited by some Dalhousie law students and some Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, or NSCAD, students, law students and art students working together to shed some light on the issue of copyright.

They had a screening of *RiP*, a remix manifesto, which is a great Canadian documentary featuring the artist Girl Talk. Girl Talk does a lot of work doing mash-ups, putting different songs together to create a completely new song. There is a big question around whether Girl Talk actually violates copyright law. I threatened to do a mash-up in the House today but I will leave that to Girl Talk.

However, I thank the students at Dalhousie and NSCAD for holding that panel because it enlightened me on the issue of copyright and made me realize how important an issue it is to the riding of Halifax, as well as across Canada.

This bill, as we know, was brought forward in the last Parliament as Bill C-32. Despite a lot of feedback from stakeholders and community organizations that the bill did not strike the right balance, it has been reintroduced and it is exactly the same bill as before. The NDP believes that copyright legislation needs to be modernized and that it is long overdue, but this bill has a lot of errors, some glaring omissions and, in certain cases, it actually creates problems where none existed before. The NDP will work to try to amend this bill to ensure it reflects the best interests of Canadians.

The NDP believes that copyright laws in Canada can balance the rights of creators and their right to be fairly compensated for their work, and the right of consumers to have reasonable access to copyrighted materials. We will look for all possible amendments. This is what committee is for. It is to bring people forward, talk about what the solutions are and to look at amendments. We will look at all possible amendments to the bill that will create a fair royalty system for creators because, as it stands, this bill would wipe away millions of dollars in revenues for artists.

As I mentioned, the constituents of Halifax have a lot at stake with this bill. First, there is a very high student population in Halifax. Students are the creators and owners of copyrighted material in their articles, essays and works of art, but, at the same time, they are also consumers. In order to study and learn, students need access to the copyrighted works of others.

I met with the Canadian Federation of Students and it pointed out that this three part perspective of use, creation and ownership of copyright gives students special credibility when it comes to the struggle for fair and balanced copyright law. I met with CFS representatives and they have reinforced to me how much any copyright reform needs to strike that balance. It needs to be fair and balanced.

With so many students in my riding, it follows that we have libraries. We have law libraries, medical libraries, archives, university and college libraries and public libraries. I have met with many librarians and they have told me that they need balance. If we are looking at this issue, no matter where in Nova Scotia or Canada we are, balance is needed. Most of the librarians I have spoken to have pointed out the fact that this legislation does not get the balance right, especially when it comes to digital locks.

As we have heard in the House, the bill would create powerful new anti-circumvention rights for content owners. I want to take a second to point out that I said "content owners". That does not necessarily mean creators or artists. It means owners. Often the owners are not the creators or the artists themselves.

•(1315)

The rights for owners prevent access to copyrighted works and they can be backed with fines of up to \$1 million and five years in jail. That would create a situation where digital locks could actually supersede all other rights, including charter rights. If we look at people being able to modify the way they can see material because they have a visual impairment, that penalty would impact someone who has an actual charter right to view this material, which is not what anyone would intend to happen.

What does this mean? It means there is a very real danger for consumers that they could be prohibited from using content that they have already paid for. Sometimes the format just needs to be changed. It has already been paid for. There should not be anything wrong with that.

The legislation is really important to people in Halifax because my community is rich with artists and creators. We are home to movie and television studios. We have video game developers, song writers and playwrights, authors, designers, sculptors and dancers. It is really incredible to think that there could be that much talent in one small city, but we are a hub of creativity and innovation.

Government Orders

In being elected by those people, I have been sent to the House to protect their rights, to protect their ownership interests in their creations and to stand up for fair compensation for their work. We will bring forward all possible amendments to the bill to create a fair royalty system for artists because, as the bill stands now, it would wipe away millions of dollars in potential revenue for artists.

The bill would grant a range of new access privileges but it would not increase opportunities for remuneration for artists. This new playing field would profoundly affect the ability of artists to survive, something that all of us have seen first-hand in our ridings. Artists and creators make our communities worth living in. They deserve access to fair compensation opportunities for their work. Without those opportunities, we risk destroying our creative communities altogether.

In the bill, there is a long and complicated list of exceptions, and I do not think it adequately recognizes creators' rights. In fact, it would create new ways for consumers to access copyrighted content. We talk about balance and we are creating new ways but at the same time we are not providing new avenues to remunerate creators for their work.

The no compromise provisions in the bill would provide sweeping powers to rights holders that would supersede all other rights. If enacted, the bill would ensure that artists could not access their work despite the fact that they own it. In the example that has been shared with me, if people are studying abroad or doing long distance education they cannot keep those materials. I would go so far as to say that it is draconian and inappropriate to ask people to destroy class notes within 30 days of the course ending. This is knowledge they have learned. They have paid for this material. It seems absurd that they would need to destroy them at the end of the course.

What are the propositions? We really need to come together at committee and hear from people who are impacted by this legislation. There is a lot of opportunity to do some very good work and modernize the bill while balancing the rights of creators and the public.

I look forward to the bill getting to committee to see what happens. I am very hopeful that the Conservatives are listening and that they will take feedback into account and work with the NDP to bring forward good, solid amendments that will benefit everyone.

• (1320)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, CPC): Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right, and, hopefully, once we defeat the Liberal motion, we will have an opportunity to bring the bill before committee to hear some more witness testimony. As I said in earlier comments, we have heard testimony from a vast array of people.

Graham Henderson of Music Canada said, we are "pleased to see long overdue copyright reform legislation back on the...agenda and a strong commitment to get it passed".

The Canadian Publishers' Council said that the government was demonstrating "a clear understanding of the need to amend the current Copyright Act to bring it more in line with our times". It strikes me that much of this bill would do just that. It would bring our legislation in line with copyright legislation around the world.

Jurisdictions around the world talk a lot about digital locks, or technical protection measures. However, in jurisdictions around the world where TPMs are protected there is actually more content available. That can protect artists but they need to ensure that consumers have access to a vast array of products.

It is frustrating to hear yet again another NDP speaker talk about the only solution for Canadian artists and Canadians is to tax them more and that will solve all the problems.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, my colleague pointed out that committee provides the opportunity to hear from stakeholders and from people in the community about the pluses and minuses, the good points and bad points. He also pointed out that, the last time the bill came around, the committee heard from all types of people from around Canada who gave feedback about this legislation. So, why is the bill exactly the same as last time?

If we really care about feedback from Canadians, if we really are listening to them, why would the bill be exactly the same as last time? I hope that this time the Conservatives actually listen.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I fail to understand why we, as legislators, are constantly pitting consumers against creators.

As a consumer of music or any other art form, I would like to be able to buy a work and know for sure that the creator who produced it was compensated.

From what I understand of the current bill—and I would like clarification from the hon. member on this—if we pass it in its current form, the coming weeks will have to be spent creating fair trade music and fair trade art, like the fair trade coffee and chocolate we get from developing countries. It does not seem to me that we are going completely in the right direction.

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his observation that so often the government is not actually looking out for creators.

If we look critically at this legislation, we can see that it would protect owners. As I said in my speech, owners are not necessarily creators, owners are not necessarily artists and owners are not necessarily users. They are publishers. They are music companies. They are industry.

This is one-sided legislation where the rights of owners would be protected but everybody else would be left out in the cold.

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I can tell the member who we are looking out for. This party will always stand up and look out for consumers across this country.

One of the opposition amendments is to place an iPod tax on MP3 players, on telephones and on other pieces of technology that actually play some of the music that is downloaded illegally.

Government Orders

I would first congratulate the member for Halifax and all Nova Scotians for the Halifax Irving Shipyard's winning bid this week. It is a tremendous opportunity, of course.

What will the member do for consumers in her riding, particularly single parents trying to buy Christmas presents for their children?

•(1325)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his congratulations and extend them to him because a lot of the shipbuilders live in his riding.

With respect to representing consumers, I will not send them to jail for five years and I will not fine them \$1 million because they may have made a mistake or tried to bust a digital lock on something that they actually already own.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Madam Speaker, there have been consultations on this travel motion and if you seek it, I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That in relation to its study of drugs and alcohol in prison, 12 members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security be authorized to travel to Kingston, Ontario, and environs on Tuesday, October 25, 2011, and that the necessary staff accompany the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

COPYRIGHT MODERNIZATION ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-11, An Act to amend the Copyright Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Madam Speaker, no one is against the modernization of the act, which has not been updated since 1988 and is considered obsolete because of the advent of the Internet and digital technologies. Many Quebec and Canadian creators have been waiting a long time for the legislation to be overhauled. Their expectations have been shattered and now they realize that the government has responded to institutional and, above all, corporate needs, and definitely not to the basic need of supporting creation.

If there is to be no creation, no support for the creative instinct that inspires any material that could be subject to the principles of copyright, why are we wasting our time setting copyright guidelines? This bill has drawn a great deal of criticism from all stakeholders affected by Bill C-11, be they academics, whom the bill is trying to please, or artists, who provide a revenue stream on which the government has always counted. There are also the members of the general public, who will be criminalized for the personal use of artistic material that they purchase. Pierre-Paul Noreau, of the newspaper *Le Soleil* had this to say:

What is astounding about the government's approach is that Bill C-11 is the exact replica of Bill C-32, which died on the order paper when the federal election was called.

But there was a long series of consultations between the two bills. Experts, artists and spokespersons from groups concerned with copyright testified during 20 meetings of a hard-working legislative committee. But since the government had already made up its mind, nothing that was said changed the original bill. The government did not even listen to constructive criticism of its approach. Cabinet reacts to such criticism by saying that amendments are still possible.

In its current form, Bill C-11 is a catastrophe for authors, since it directly undermines copyright, which is how authors earn their meagre incomes. The proposal reduces the potential to earn real dollars and does not offer any alternatives. For example, the education system will now have much more freedom to use works in class, whereas it currently pays tens of millions of dollars to authors every year. Similarly, the logical principle of a levy on blank cassettes and CDs that had existed until now, but that has been bringing in less and less money, will not apply to digital audio recorders such as iPods, which have replaced these formats for storing copied music and images. This means that artists will see their revenue sources dry up in the interest of more freedom for users.

The answer is sad, yet clear. Since the government has said that it is open only to technical amendments, creators will have to cling to the hope of the mandatory review that will be conducted in five years, if they are able to hold out that long. This long-awaited update contains several well-targeted elements. Unfortunately, it has one major weakness. The reform fails to consider the minor creators. Some creators and participants in the cultural industry have criticized the government for failing to extend the royalties they receive on blank CDs to new technologies, such as the iPod, in order to compensate them for the reproduction of their works.

•(1330)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. It being 1:30 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the hon. member. The hon. member will have six minutes left the next time this bill is called for debate.

The House will now proceed to consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR FISHERY REBUILDING ACT

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP) moved that Bill C-308, An Act respecting a Commission of Inquiry into the development and implementation of a national fishery rebuilding strategy for fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, my private member's bill, Bill C-308, is an act respecting a commission of inquiry into the development and implementation of a national fishery rebuilding strategy for fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The short title of my bill, the title that cuts to the chase, is the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery rebuilding act. The key word is "rebuilding". We must rebuild. We must rebuild what was once one of the world's greatest protein resources, the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. We must rebuild what has been lost to us. We must rebuild the fish stocks and use them as a foundation for life after oil, as a foundation for the future of Newfoundland and Labrador. Let "rebuild" be the one word that resonates with every member of the House.

It is almost 20 years after the fall of the Newfoundland and Labrador cod fisheries and there has been practically no rebuilding, none. Why? This is the key question that an inquiry would answer. Why have stocks not rejuvenated? Why have stocks not been rebuilt? Why has the moratorium stretched almost 20 years when John Crosbie said, in 1992, that it would last only two years? Commercial fish stocks are in desperate shape, about as desperate as they were when the fisheries were first closed. Why?

Soon after Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, she handed over responsibility of her fisheries to the Government of Canada to manage. The fisheries were our offshore oil of today, an incredible resource and wealth, only, unlike oil, the fisheries were an incredible renewable resource, a renewable wealth.

Sixty-two years after Confederation and our commercial fisheries for species such as cod, what was once known as Newfoundland currency, are on their knees. How far have we fallen? For most of the year, it is illegal to jig a cod, to jig a fish from the vastness of the north Atlantic.

What was once seen as a Newfoundland birthright is now a crime. However, the real crime is the fact that nothing has been done, that the fish resource has not been rebuilt, that we have not acted. The real crime is that a generation later and the stocks are still in the same desperate shape.

The Grand Banks of Newfoundland were fished out. It is plain and simple.

In the year 1968, the northern cod catch was officially recorded at 810,000 tonnes, three times the estimated maximum sustainable catch. Unofficially, more than one million tonnes of northern cod were taken from the sea that year. It has been downhill ever since.

Private Members' Business

To be clear, this is not about blame. There is blame to be shared by everyone, by the Government of Canada, by the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, by foreign trawlers, by our own domestic fleet, by viewing the fishery as an occupation of last resort, by international organizations that are powerless, that are toothless to manage migratory stocks, by the use of fish stocks as international bargaining chips, by greed, by apathy everywhere. The apathy must end.

• (1335)

To quote Newfoundlander Rex Murphy from a *National Post* column earlier this month:

Newfoundland is in silent crisis...Increasingly, St. John's highly concentrated economy resembles a sort of miniature Hong Kong amidst an increasingly deserted province. Out-migration is stealing a whole generation of Newfoundlanders. The outports are becoming just places "where the parents live," and the larger centres outside St. John's have become dominated by old-age homes.

To quote another Newfoundland, Zita Cobb of Fogo Island, who is renowned as an entrepreneur and a visionary and who is behind one of the largest projects every attempted to preserve even a small portion of rural Newfoundland. She says, "If something isn't done now, we are going to be disconnected from our sense of community and our sense of past. The most tragic thing that could happen and it is happening now, is for a son not to understand his father's life".

Our Newfoundland and Labrador culture, a culture steeped in the fishery, is slowly dying. *Let Me Fish Off Cape Saint Mary's* is one of the most powerful Newfoundland and Labrador songs ever written. Will there come a day when we will not relate to that song, or a day when we are forced to change the words to, "Let me drill off Fort McMurray"? We must rebuild, or that will happen.

The ultimate tragedy is not so much that the stocks collapsed, but that there is no plan to rebuild them. That is Confederation's greatest failure. That is our national embarrassment. That is our national shame. That is Newfoundland and Labrador's silent crisis.

Canada once bore the reputation as a great steward of the sea. Our reputation today is worth as much as an empty net. An inquiry would investigate federal and provincial fisheries management. Is the management working? The ultimate measure of that management is the state of the stocks, the state of the industry. The management, obviously, is not working. Stock after stock has failed.

One of the last reports on northern cod was carried out in 2005 by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. The report was entitled, "Northern Cod: A Failure of Canadian Fisheries Management". The title says it all.

Private Members' Business

Ask me what was done with that report. Nothing, even though the report took DFO to task for failing to recognize mismanagement as one of the reasons for the stock collapse. That report also questioned why a recovery plan had not been drawn up describing DFO's lack of long-term vision as astonishing.

The federal Conservative government called an inquiry in 2009 into the decline of sockeye salmon on British Columbia's Fraser River. How can the federal government investigate management policy on one end of the country and not the other, when it has so clearly failed everywhere?

Newfoundland and Labrador's commercial salmon fishery was shut down in 1991, 20 years ago this week. There has been no recovery. Do hon. members see a trend? Because there is a trend.

An inquiry would also investigate the state of fishery science. Science has and is being gutted. Instead of rebuilding for the future, we are taking away our opportunity for a future.

An inquiry would also investigate fisheries enforcement and quotas. Who rules the rights to the fish in the sea and who exactly is fishing the quotas? Who is benefiting from the quotas? An inquiry would investigate the effectiveness of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization in managing migratory stocks outside the 200 mile limit. Has it been effective? Absolutely not.

At NAFO's recent general meeting in Halifax the quotas for most groundfish stocks were cut across the board. All stocks are in trouble.

• (1340)

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, which I sit on, tabled a report in the House last week on the snow crab resource. The study was triggered by concerns expressed after DFO cut the snow crab harvest in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence by 63%. DFO had been warned to cut the quota but the minister ignored the advice. Again, this is not about blame. I purposely avoid laying blame. That is not what this is about.

Recommendation three of the snow crab report advises that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans strike a task force to review the snow crab assessment process and the management of the fishery. However, the problem is not just with the management of the snow crab resource but also with the management of all the fish that swim off Newfoundland and Labrador shores. Today in my province, pan-size fish are being exported to places such as China and the U.S. for processing while the plants we have left are closing permanently and our aging plant workers are protesting in the streets. We are scraping the bottom of the barrel and the bottom of the sea. We must rebuild.

Experts have said that a healthy groundfish stock could provide an annual harvest of 400,000 tonnes. The total groundfish harvest last year for all of Newfoundland and Labrador amounted to less than 20,000 tonnes. We could have a healthy harvest of 400,000 tonnes. Last year, it was less than 20,000 tonnes, which is a shadow or skeleton of our once great fisheries of the great Grand Banks of Newfoundland. The time to rebuild is now.

The Prime Minister once described the east coast as having a culture of defeat. I stand before the members to say that is not the case. It is far from it. We are fighting for our culture and our rural

way of life in Newfoundland and Labrador. We want to ensure that we can provide for ourselves rather than revert to what we have been labelled in the past, a label which I am sure everyone in the House has heard and one that is absolutely incorrect, that being that we are a drain on Canadian Confederation. That is not the case.

If the fisheries and the Grand Banks of Newfoundland had been banks that were mismanaged into bankruptcy there would have been demands for accountability, for reform and for an overhaul to ensure that never happened again. The Grand Banks of Newfoundland and Labrador in my home province deserve no less.

I urge all hon. members to support my private member's bill. It is not just the fish stocks that need rebuilding but also our faith in this country to help individual provinces stand on their own.

• (1345)

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, in just a few minutes we will have opportunity to disagree with my colleague on many of the points he made in his eloquent presentation.

What he did not flesh out well enough for us is the number of reviews that have already taken place since 1992 into the collapse of the cod stocks. He only referred to one. I took part in that study. However, there were at least a dozen, some from the provinces, from the federal government, from the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council and one from the Auditor General's Office. There is a long list.

What does the member think spending millions of dollars would do that these other studies have not done? The follow-up question would be, why is the province of Newfoundland not supporting his call for a commission of inquiry into the matter?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Madam Speaker, I would be interested to hear exactly which points in my speech the hon. member disagreed with.

As for why the Progressive Conservative Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has not called for an inquiry, I suggest that the hon. Conservative member across the way ask the Minister of Fisheries.

The government has to make a decision as to whether there will be an inquiry and the decision has to come not just from the federal Conservative government but also from the provincial government of my home province. The federal Government of Canada looks after harvesting. The provincial government looks after processing. The federal government looks after fishing boats. My home province looks after fishing plants. The bottom line is that the management at the federal and provincial levels of government has not worked. Maybe it is the fact that both levels of government do not want to admit that the management has not worked.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans asked why we should spend millions of dollars on an inquiry. His province is spending millions of dollars on an inquiry into a salmon run that failed miserably.

My hon. colleague from Newfoundland is absolutely correct. I was the NDP fisheries critic for over 13 years. I asked for a national federal inquiry into the practices and policies of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. In the period 1998 to 2000 the Hutchings and Myers report came out, which the hon. parliamentary secretary should know, and those two scientists indicated that there was science manipulation at the very highest levels within DFO when it came to the collapse of the cod stocks. The government of the day was warned that the cod stocks were in trouble and it ignored that warning.

That is just one tiny element of why we need to get to the bottom of the serious mismanagement of the fisheries and oceans in this country. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that, please.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Madam Speaker, the question has been asked as to how many reports have been written in the past looking into the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: How many have been ignored?

• (1350)

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question. How many reports into the fishery have been ignored? There are untold numbers. There is an inquiry going on into the disappearance of salmon stocks in B.C.'s Fraser River. The last I heard, that inquiry has a price tag of roughly \$25 million.

The point I want to make is that we have not had a ground fishery since 1992, going back 19 years. There are experts who say if it was a healthy resource there could have been an annual harvest of 400,000 tonnes going back 19 years and every year into the future. How many untold hundreds of millions of dollars would that be worth?

In terms of the question about why we need another inquiry, we need an inquiry specifically into why the management of this fishery has failed. Why has it failed? I challenge the member opposite to show me the report that shows the way forward, that shows all the problems with the management of the fisheries in the past. That report does not exist. The only way to get a report is to have an inquiry into the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the debate on Bill C-308.

I thank my colleague for his comments on this. I know he has an interest in Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a province I love as well, having spent a fair bit of time there in my current capacity. I am pleased to see that he appears to have abandoned any notions of his musings in earlier years of separation from Confederation.

I agree with him when he talks about the importance of the fishery in Newfoundland and Labrador, but I do want to say up front that we are not going to support the bill.

Private Members' Business

The bill is premised on several assumptions, false assumptions in large part, that I would like to address.

The first of these is that there has been no recovery of fish stocks since the 1990s and that this has led to more than 80,000 people leaving Newfoundland and Labrador. This is not quite true.

The decline of fish stocks is blamed on several factors, including: inaccurate scientific data and projections; environmental factors, including temperature shifts in the ocean; predation; and poor fisheries management, including overfishing. This is why the collapse of the Atlantic ground fisheries and related fisheries management practices have already been thoroughly reviewed.

There have been at least 12 different reports or studies published on the topic over the past 18 years. For example, the latest report, released in September of this year by the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, made several recommendations for a long-term strategic approach to the sustainability of eastern Canadian groundfish fisheries. As a result of these numerous reports and studies, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has implemented modern fisheries management policies. The department is committed to continued conservation and rebuilding efforts and to perfecting its practices to ensure the conservation of groundfish stocks in the Atlantic.

The number of registered harvesters in Newfoundland and Labrador has declined; about this, the member is correct. It is notable that many of those who remained transitioned their enterprises to more lucrative shellfish species, like snow crab, shrimp, and lobster. In fact, Newfoundland and Labrador has increased its relative importance in Canada's commercial harvesting industry. In 1990 the province accounted for 20% of the total value of commercial landings in Canada. Today that share has increased to 30%. Since 1990, the average annual growth in the value of Newfoundland and Labrador commercial landings has been higher than that of any other province.

Second, on reading the bill one might be led to believe that there had been a lack of organized efforts to rebuild Newfoundland and Labrador's fisheries or to restore the province's economic base. Let me set the record straight. In the past 20 years, the government has invested over \$4 billion to assist the industry and help affected communities adjust to the changes in the resource base. This included \$2.5 billion in income replacement, over \$600 million in training and counselling, and \$1 billion on licence retirement, economic diversification, stock rebuilding, et cetera. In addition, allocation of various shellfish species was also provided to facilitate the diversification of the industry.

Private Members' Business

Fisheries and Oceans Canada worked with the province of Newfoundland and Labrador in an intentional and systematic way to address these challenges. For example, shortly after the announcement of the second moratorium on the harvesting of southern and northern gulf stocks of Atlantic cod, the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador formed the Canada-Newfoundland and Labrador Action Team for Cod Rebuilding. The action team was mandated to develop a stock rebuilding and long-term management strategy for the four major cod stocks adjacent to the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. These efforts resulted in the release of the federal-provincial strategy for the rebuilding of Atlantic cod stocks.

In terms of international fisheries management practices, to which my colleague referred, the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, NAFO, has made significant improvements in fisheries management, science, and enforcement. These improvements have been validated by the recently released NAFO performance review, which included the input of external experts. I encourage my colleague to read it.

•(1355)

Some improvements noted in the NAFO performance review were in key areas such as stock management, science advice, protection of vulnerable marine ecosystems and enforcement measures. I also want to mention that NAFO scientists have become world leaders in the provision of science advice on vulnerable marine ecosystems. NAFO has taken key steps to strengthen enforcement measures leading to improvement in compliance.

For example, since 2006, it has reached new definitions of a range of serious infringements. There has been the development of provisions for immediate recall to port for major infractions and clearer directions to NAFO members on penalties to be employed by flag states for serious infringements. As a result of these changes and thanks largely to Canadian-led enforcement efforts, infractions in NAFO areas have been significantly, even dramatically reduced.

Bill C-308 mistakenly accuses NAFO of failing to rebuild migratory fish stocks. I should point out that NAFO is responsible for the management of straddling stocks, not migratory species. Rebuilding straddling stocks has now been identified as one of the main objectives of NAFO which is reflected in the new convention which was ratified by the Government of Canada in December 2009.

Over the past several years, NAFO, led by Canada, has implemented a number of innovative rebuilding plans for the recovery of moratorium stocks and to rebuild fragile stocks. These plans are based on scientific advice and the precautionary approach. They include conservation plans and rebuilding strategies for American plaice and cod.

In 2009 NAFO reopened two key stocks, 3M cod and 3LN red fish, that were under moratorium for over a decade. Recovery of other stocks is proving successful and some may be eligible for reopening in the next few years.

In the bill, my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl identifies fisheries as:

—a renewable resource which can, with revitalized conservation and management practices, be rebuilt for the benefit of present and future generations and

contribute towards the economic growth of rural Newfoundland and Labrador and all of Canada.

That is exactly what we have done.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada, on behalf of the Government of Canada, is responsible for developing and implementing policies and programs in support of Canada's scientific, ecological, social and economic interests in oceans and fresh waters. In working toward these outcomes, the department is guided by the principles of sound scientific knowledge and effective management.

Fisheries and Oceans Canada's approach to fisheries management has changed significantly over the last two decades. The sustainable fisheries framework introduced in April 2009 has introduced policies that provide the basis for ensuring Canadian fisheries are conducted in a manner that supports conservation and sustainable use of our fisheries resources.

I encourage my colleague to become familiar with this framework. He will find it incorporates existing fisheries management policies with new and evolving policies and provides planning and monitoring tools. These policies will promote the continued sustainability of stocks upon which commercial fisheries depend. As other stocks grow, emerging commercial fisheries will be managed in a way that is sustainable.

As these actions demonstrate, this government continues to take action to rebuild the Atlantic fisheries and no inquiry is necessary.

•(1400)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to private member's Bill C-308 put forward by the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. I support this piece of legislation, as does the Liberal Party of Canada.

Nearly two years after the first commercial fishing moratorium was introduced, there has still been no substantial recovery of fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador. The collapse of the fishery has had devastating effects on communities in rural Newfoundland because this had been the largest fishery in Canada and the focal point of the local economy.

The recent signs of possible recovery are hopeful but that only makes it more important that we do everything in our power as a nation to prevent this from happening again. It is important that we really understand what we need to do differently to ensure the health of our fish stocks.

The Liberal Party supports this long overdue federal inquiry into the collapse and mismanagement of fish stocks off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador.

The parliamentary secretary talked about the many inquiries that have been held into this regrettable situation. I want to point out that the result that Canadians need has not been achieved. We have not fully understood how the Government of Canada and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans made the decisions that led to the absolute collapse of such an important fish stock. It is urgent that we understand that. We are seeing a repeat of this kind of crash with other fish stock.

Private Members' Business

As the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl mentioned, the parliamentary committee on fisheries has been studying for many months the collapse of the snow crab stock. I had the privilege of being on that committee for a year. We learned to our surprise and shock that the department had not been implementing the precautionary principle in its management of the snow crab in 2009, and we are now hearing that the precautionary principle was not being implemented as a clear framework.

The precautionary principle is something people have understood since the 1980s. We had an earth summit in the early 1990s. We had a world summit on sustainable development in 2002. The precautionary principle surely is a baseline approach for managing these important renewable natural resources, but it has not been a baseline approach in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. An inquiry is an important tool in order to do a better job and get a better result.

It is not just on the east coast of Canada that we are having challenges with sustainable management of important fisheries. We have our challenges on the west coast as well, and I will point to the salmon fishery as a prime example.

The Fraser River sockeye salmon stock collapsed in 2010. The numbers came in at one-tenth the number expected by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. There was an outcry from people asking why our fisheries were being mismanaged, not just to the extent that we were having crashes, but to the extent that we did not even know why we were having crashes. Fortunately, the Cohen inquiry is looking into the disaster in the Pacific salmon fishery. We need that same kind of attention and that same kind of lens on the fisheries of Newfoundland and Labrador.

That is not to say that an inquiry is enough. Other things need to be done as well, and one of those things is the adequate funding of fishery science. Instead, a hatchet is being taken to the budget of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, cutting \$57 million this year alone. That means research scientists along with budgets for international co-operation projects to identify what is happening with the salmon when they go outside Canadian jurisdiction will be cut.

•(1405)

It means boats will be tied up in harbours, DFO research vessels will be tied up in harbours, unable to afford the gas to go out and find out what is happening. It means that funding for the POST listening system, which is an innovative way of tracking small salmon smolts on the west coast of Canada to identify where they are disappearing and helping us understand why they are disappearing, is woefully inadequate for what is necessary to actually track these smolts as they go out into the ocean. It remains a black box, a mystery, why, year after year, other than for a few anomaly years, we are having decline in our precious stocks of Pacific salmon.

Pacific salmon, like cod on the east coast, is an iconic species for Canadians. It has been the basis for the economies of coastal communities. It has been the basis for the culture of Canadian aboriginal peoples. It has been part of their identity, their celebration. It has been central to the Pacific coast. Our salmon stocks are disappearing and we do not even know why. Yet, we are cutting the budgets of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans which is charged

with the responsibility of protecting salmon and other important stocks. This is shocking. That is the kind of thing that I expect an inquiry into the fisheries in Newfoundland and Labrador to shed a light on, so that all Canadians can support having conservation as a number one principle. The degree to which conservation was not held as a fundamental principle by the previous fisheries minister was highlighted in the snow crab process.

I would disagree in this small point with the member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl when he said it is not about laying blame. Actually, I disagree with that. We had a Conservative fisheries minister who deliberately and knowingly ignored the advice of her fisheries scientists who said that there was a very strong risk of a collapse of the snow crab stocks if the quotas were not reduced. That minister ignored the advice of her scientists and took the advice of lobbyists who said, "No, don't worry. Be happy. Keep the quota where it's been".

We cannot allow that kind of interference in our fisheries management, not on the east coast and not on the west coast. We cannot allow these kinds of cuts to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans when we are losing these iconic stocks and we have not even understood why.

Permit me a quick aside about the aquaculture review that the fisheries committee was undertaking.

Recently, the management of the aquaculture industry and potential impacts on wild salmon has been transferred to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. The regulation of that important industry so that it does not affect our wild fish stocks is a very important role of Department of Fisheries and Oceans. It needs to do a better job than the province was doing in the past. How can we expect the Department of Fisheries and Oceans to do its job, to understand the science of the aquaculture industry and the wild fisheries in those interactions? How can we expect it to do that with these massive cuts to the Department of Fisheries and Oceans?

I support, and the Liberal Party supports, this inquiry because we need more, not less, transparency and more, not less, accountability and more, not less, science so that we can protect our wild fisheries this year, the next decade, and into the future as our legacy to our children.

•(1410)

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Newfoundland and Labrador for his intervention. I also thank the people of Newfoundland and Labrador for allowing Canada to join Newfoundland and Labrador in 1949.

I would say that what salmon is to British Columbians, what pickerel and bass are to central Canadians, what Arctic char is to northern Canada, cod fish is to Newfoundland and Labrador. It is a symbol of heritage. It is a symbol of the people. In fact, many Newfoundlanders and Labradorians can trace their ancestry to people who have fished the great seas in the past for their livelihood.

Private Members' Business

With Remembrance Week coming up, it would be fair to say that the people of Newfoundland and Labrador have not only fed the world, they have also fed many great soldiers, airmen, airwomen and sailors not only in Canada but our Allies in other countries throughout the war effort as well. Many a soldier ate bully beef as well as salt cod.

We also know that trade between the Caribbean and Newfoundland and Labrador ran from cod to rum. I thought that was a balanced trade deal.

However, I believe the reason why the Conservatives do not want an inquiry is because they do not want to know the truth. They do not want to know the facts.

I was on the fisheries and oceans committee for over 13 years. We studied all aspects of the fisheries in this country to death to come up with reports, of which 95% were unanimous, meaning members of the Reform, Alliance, the PC Party, the Bloc Québécois, NDP, Liberals and the Conservatives at the time supported those recommendations, only to have them fall flat on the desk of the minister of the day.

In 1998, I asked for a full judicial inquiry into the practices and policies of the management of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans for Canada.

Hutchings and Myers are the best oceanographic and fishery scientists in Canada and the world. They said very clearly in their report when they came to Parliament Hill that in their opinion science had been manipulated at the highest levels when it came to the cod crisis in this country. What party was in government at the time that happened? It was the Conservative Party of Canada. Those are the facts.

In my mind, it was the Kirby report of 1982, which formulated the companies of Fisheries Products International and National Seas, that started the over aggressive fishing of those stocks which caused the downfall of the outports of not only Newfoundland and Labrador but also the provinces of P.E.I., New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.

People anywhere who believe that the management of Canadian fisheries is any good at all are fooling themselves. We and the Conservatives know that is not the case. I can quote numerous interventions wherein Progressive Conservatives, Reformers and members of the Alliance were slamming the Liberal Party for the mismanagement of the fisheries in Canada. They were good at it too.

I remember a certain John Cummins of British Columbia who was probably one of the most vocal critics of fisheries management in this country. He did a fantastic job at it because he was a commercial fisherman. Even his own party did not like some of his criticisms. However, he was not only standing up and fighting for the fishermen of his province but also for their way of life. On some parts I obviously disagreed with him but I could not knock his passion and desire to stand up for the men and women whose livelihoods were made from the sea.

Right now both the provincial and federal governments are concentrating on oil resources, the so-called non-renewable resources of this country, the petro-economy. Time and again I

have asked, what will happen when oil and gas resources are gone? No response is forthcoming. There is only silence on that side.

If the fisheries are managed correctly and properly, seven generations down the road will be able to access a renewable, natural, healthy, vibrant food-based resource, not just for the people of Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador but for the entire world.

• (1415)

Why, in the life of any parliamentarian, would we not want to do everything possible, everything within our power, be it federally, provincially or municipally, including opposition members, to ensure the sanctity and the survival of that renewable resource?

I have tremendous respect for my good friend and hon. colleague, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. He is one of the nicest people I have ever met, but he quotes from and talks about the FRCC report. I have worked for a long time with the FRCC. Its members are fantastic fishermen, scientists, environmentalists, et cetera. However, what did the government just do to the FRCC? It cut its funding to the point where it no longer will exist.

One second the Conservatives will quote its report and hand it up as a litmus of sound management and advice and then cut its funding. Why do they do that? How many scientists now within DFO across this country are about to lose their jobs? When we heard the parliamentary secretary speak, I felt like buying a fishing boat. I felt like quitting my job, selling everything and going out fishing because, according to them, I am going to be well off. That is what Crosbie said in 1992. I remember when Pierre Pettigrew introduced the TAGS program so people would get five years of employment subsidy and payment subsidies and retraining so those who were left in the fishery would be well off. The folks were told not to worry, that they would be given bit of money, with a few shackles here, and they could train to be barbers. We had five barbers one time train for one small town of a couple of hundred people. That turned out really well. The fact is that it failed.

What did Premier Dunderdale say the day after she was elected? She said that they would need to deal with the fishery and reduce the number of fishermen and plant workers in the province. Not necessarily like that, but she said words similar to that. It is funny that she never spoke like that during the campaign. She only spoke like that after the campaign.

I am not blaming anyone here. It was not the Conservatives alone that mismanaged the fisheries. It was the federal Governments of Canada, the provincial governments, the fishing industry, the international fleets and NAFO. Everyone is partially to blame for this, including, I may say, the opposition, at times pushing for extra resources to help people get through the bad times, to get their EI, et cetera. We are all responsible for the downturn in the fishery. It is also our job to hold them to their fire, not just the Conservatives but the Liberals and previous governments before that. It is not a question of pinning one blame against the other. That is easy to do.

Private Members' Business

However, an inquiry would get everything out in the open and find out where the problems were, what the government and others have been doing to this point and where the road map to the future leads. That is Canada's national shame and the world looks at us saying that we had one of the world's largest, abundant, prolific protein fish stocks on the planet and now it is minuscule compared to what it used to be. Over 20 years and more, it is still the way it was in 1992. That is the shame.

I just want to thank my hon. colleague from St. John's, Newfoundland, for bringing this forward. I ask the government to reconsider, call for the inquiry, get the facts on the table and truly help the good people of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-308, the Newfoundland and Labrador Fishery Rebuilding Act.

It was cod that first brought Europeans to Newfoundland. It was catching, salting, drying and marketing of cod that prompted the first settlements in this region. The fishery has been active for hundreds of years in Newfoundland and Labrador. It was and remains an integral part of its culture and life.

The cod catch peaked in 1968 at 810,000 tonnes. However, as we know, the industry collapsed in the early 1990s. Several factors have been cited as causing the collapse, overfishing, lack of foresight and environmental factors among them. As a result, a two-year moratorium on the northern cod fishery was announced July 2, 1992, by the Honourable John Crosbie, then Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. By 1993, six cod populations had collapsed, forcing a complete moratorium on fishing. Populations had decreased by at least 75% in all stocks, by 90% in three of the six stocks and by 99% in the case of northern cod, previously the largest cod fishery in the world.

There have been numerous reports and studies on this subject. Dr. Leslie Harris published the influential 1990 "Independent Review of the State of the Northern Cod Stocks", the "Report of the Northern Cod Review Panel", and the 2004 "A Policy Framework for the Management of Fisheries on Canada's Atlantic Coast". In 1993, the Task Force on Incomes and Adjustments in the Atlantic Fishery published "Charting a New Course: Towards the Fishery of the Future", also known as the Cashin report.

The Fisheries Resource Conservation Council produced "A Groundfish Conservation Framework for Atlantic Canada". In 2001 it published "The Management of Fisheries on Canada's Atlantic Coast: A Discussion Document on Policy Direction and Principles", and in 2003 it published "Preserving the Independence of the Inshore Fleet in Canada's Atlantic Fisheries". Since 2003, the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council alone has published more than 50 reports on stock conditions, conservation and just about every aspect of the fishery, including "Towards Recovered and Sustainable Groundfish Fisheries in Eastern Canada", which was released just last month.

Let us not overlook the work of our own House committees, starting with the 2002 "Report on Foreign Overfishing: Its Impacts and Solutions" from the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans. In 2005 the committee produced the "Report on Northern Cod: A Failure of Canadian Fisheries Management" and in 2009 its

report on "Amendments to the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization Convention", not mention the House committee's other regular reports.

We cannot forget the work of Senate committees, including the 2003 report "Straddling Fish Stocks in the Northwest Atlantic" and the 2005 "Interim Report on Canada's New and Evolving Policy Framework for Managing Fisheries and Oceans".

All of this is to say that this issue has been studied in considerable depth. The federal government has worked with Atlantic provinces on projects for regional economic development and fisheries adjustments since the collapse. I would like to specifically mention the 2003 federal and provincial all-party committee report that presented alternatives to full closure of the cod fisheries. The report, entitled "Stability, Sustainability and Prosperity: Charting a Future for Northern and Gulf Cod Stocks", presented solutions such as reducing the seal population, improving fisheries science, implementing sustainable fishing practices and improved enforcement of fisheries management regulations.

We are well aware of major factors in the groundfish decline. Environmental conditions, predator-prey relations and excessive harvesting have all been identified as causes of stock declines.

Fishing levels were set above conservation standards, fishers caught more than they were allocated and some fishers used unsustainable fishing practices. The government and industry learned from these crises and since the moratorium have dramatically changed fisheries management practices, science research and international practices.

• (1420)

Canada is not alone in working on these issues. Countries that are members of the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization, including Norway, Iceland, Russia, Japan, the European Union, the United States and South Korea, among others, have made the rebuilding of fish stocks one of the primary objectives. This is reflected in the new convention as well as within the shared scientific and management activities member countries undertake to ensure stocks are managed under the precautionary approach and that sensitive habitat for fish stocks is adequately protected.

In line with the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial priority for the recovery of cod and American plaice stocks, it was encouraging to see the Northwest Atlantic Fisheries Organization adopt new rebuilding plans for these species on the Grand Banks. These plans are in line with our precautionary approach to fisheries management.

Rebuilding plans can only be successful if all countries involved work together with measures such as these and continue to apply enforcement measures to keep bycatches to the lowest possible level.

Private Members' Business

Despite the fact that shellfish have dominated the Atlantic fishing industry in terms of value and effort since the collapse of most groundfish species in the 1990s, cod still holds a place of pre-eminence among those who rely on the fishery for their livelihood as a species upon which the Atlantic fishery was built.

The cod fishery is at the core of the cultural roots of many coastal rural communities in Atlantic Canada and Quebec. This is the reason why conservation and rebuilding of Atlantic cod stocks is a government priority and there are indications that some code stocks are beginning to recover, such as cod on the eastern Scotian shelf and the Flemish Cap.

We are taking action on the priorities of Canadians who work hard and play by the rules and we have steered our country through the worst global economic recession since the 1930s. We seek to promote a strong quality of life in all communities, cities, towns and rural communities, to respect and preserve the culture and values of rural Canada and help ensure the success of traditional industries like the fisheries.

Consider our actions in the past: providing to fish harvesters the same lifetime capital gains exemption enjoyed by farmers and small business owners; in supporting small coastal communities through regulatory initiatives in support of the aquaculture sector; and through investments in small craft harbours.

The global economy remains fragile and Canadians remain concerned about their jobs and their children's future. Government is making the necessary investments to protect Canadians and create jobs now, while laying a strong foundation for long-term economic growth.

The benefits of fishery decisions made today may not accrue until a number of years in the future. Those who bear the brunt of the immediate costs may not be those who will realize the future benefits of our work today. This is why the government believes the best way forward is to manage the recovery of fish stocks through a comprehensive, integrated and Atlantic-wide approach that will build on the unprecedented collaboration of all parties to date.

Given the studies, reports and initiatives I have just mentioned and given the changes implemented as well as continuing progress since the moratorium, a judicial inquiry, as proposed in Bill C-308, would be a costly and duplicative exercise. An inquiry would divert funds and resources away from the ongoing efforts to strengthen Canada's fisheries and the Canadian economy.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine. He may begin his comments, but I will have to interrupt him shortly.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will do my best to be very brief.

[*English*]

I rise in the House today in support of my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl and his bill, Bill C-308.

Like my colleague, I represent a riding that relies on fisheries for its livelihood. Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine is made up of two regions that rely on fishing. Particularly in the islands, the fisheries form the bedrock of this community's culture.

The short title of the bill is the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery rebuilding act. I am impressed by the focus for the bill, which is on rebuilding.

In the bill's terms of reference, it commits to conducting an inquiry:

—without seeking to find fault on the part of any individual, community or organization, and with the overall aim of respecting conservation, rebuilding and sustainability of all fish stock and encouraging broad cooperation among stakeholders.

Rather than ascribing blame to any group or individual for the gradual collapse of one vital fishery after another, Bill C-308 focuses instead on how the federal government can take responsibility for the mismanagement of the east coast fisheries.

It requires the government to hold an inquiry into the reasons why the fisheries have collapsed and how the stakeholders can work together to rebuild the Newfoundland fisheries.

• (1430)

The Deputy Speaker: I must interrupt the hon. member. He will have eight and a half minutes when the bill returns on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[*English*]

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

APPENDIX

**ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS WITH THEIR
CONSTITUENCIES, PROVINCE OF CONSTITUENCY
AND POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS;
COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE,
THE MINISTRY AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY**

CHAIR OCCUPANTS

The Speaker

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

The Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole

MS. DENISE SAVOIE

The Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BARRY DEVOLIN

The Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BRUCE STANTON

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

MS. CHRIS CHARLTON

MR. JOE COMARTIN

MS. JUDY FOOTE

HON. ROB MERRIFIELD

HON. GORDON O'CONNOR

HON. PETER VAN LOAN

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs)	Calgary—Nose Hill	Alberta	CPC
Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs	Mississauga—Brampton South	Ontario	CPC
Adler, Mark	York Centre	Ontario	CPC
Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	Nunavut	CPC
Albas, Dan	Okanagan—Coquihalla	British Columbia	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	Ontario	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	Ontario	CPC
Allen, Malcolm	Welland	Ontario	NDP
Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	New Brunswick	CPC
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook	Ontario	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	Ontario	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	Alberta	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	Alberta	CPC
Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	Saskatchewan	CPC
Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	Ontario	NDP
Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley	Nova Scotia	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway	Fredericton	New Brunswick	CPC
Ashton, Niki	Churchill	Manitoba	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	Ontario	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	British Columbia	NDP
Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	Québec	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	Québec	NDP
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean	Ontario	CPC
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	Manitoba	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Ontario	Lib.
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	Québec	BQ
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's	Ontario	Lib.
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	Alberta	CPC
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	Québec	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	Québec	CPC
Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	Northwest Territories	NDP
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake	Manitoba	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	Québec	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	Québec	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	Québec	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	Saskatchewan	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Boivin, Françoise.....	Gatineau	Québec	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	Québec	NDP
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	Saskatchewan	CPC
Boularice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	Québec	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	Québec	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	Québec	NDP
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	Ontario	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	Saskatchewan	CPC
Brison, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	Québec	NDP
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	Ontario	CPC
Bruinooge, Rod	Winnipeg South	Manitoba	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	Ontario	CPC
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Calandra, Paul , Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	Ontario	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	Alberta	CPC
Canan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	British Columbia	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	Ontario	CPC
Caron, Guy	Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques	Québec	NDP
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health....	Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Prince Edward Island....	Lib.
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	Ontario	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	Ontario	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant..	Québec	NDP
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	Nova Scotia	NDP
Chisu, Cornelius	Pickering—Scarborough East ..	Ontario	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	Ontario	CPC
Choquette, François	Drummond	Québec	NDP
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	Ontario	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	Ontario	NDP
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River	Saskatchewan	CPC
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Ontario	CPC
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Québec	Lib.
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	Ontario	NDP
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	Québec	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Québec	Lib.
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	British Columbia	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	British Columbia	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	Ontario	CPC
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	British Columbia	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	British Columbia	NDP
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	Québec	NDP
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	Ontario	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	Ontario	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Ontario	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	Ontario	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Québec	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	Québec	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	British Columbia	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	Québec	NDP
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	Alberta	CPC
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	Québec	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	British Columbia	CPC
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Ontario	Lib.
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	Alberta	NDP
Dusseault, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	Québec	NDP
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	Ontario	CPC
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	Ontario	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	British Columbia	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	British Columbia	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	Ontario	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia	Manitoba	CPC
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia	Québec	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	Québec	NDP
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	British Columbia	Lib.
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	Ontario	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Ontario	CPC
Garneau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Québec	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	British Columbia	NDP
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	Québec	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	Québec	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Gill, Parm.....	Brampton—Springdale	Ontario	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface.....	Manitoba	CPC
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	New Brunswick.....	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	Alberta	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Saskatchewan	Lib.
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario) ..	Cambridge.....	Ontario	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport).....	Bramalea—Gore—Malton.....	Ontario	CPC
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec ..	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.....	Québec	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	Ontario	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	British Columbia	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	Québec	NDP
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister.....	Calgary Southwest	Alberta	CPC
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest.....	Ontario	NDP
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	Newfoundland and Labrador.....	NDP
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	British Columbia	CPC
Hassainia, Sana.....	Verchères—Les Patriotes	Québec	NDP
Hawn, Hon. Laurie.....	Edmonton Centre	Alberta	CPC
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	Ontario	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale	British Columbia	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	Alberta	CPC
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	Saskatchewan	CPC
Hoepner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	Manitoba	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	Ontario	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Ontario	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing	Ontario	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	Ontario	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Mississquoi	Québec	NDP
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	Ontario	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	Alberta	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	British Columbia	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission	British Columbia	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Ontario	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's Bay	Nova Scotia	CPC
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	Ontario	NDP
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	Alberta	CPC
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	Ontario	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	Saskatchewan	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry ...	Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont	Alberta	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Manitoba	Lib.
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	Québec	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	Québec	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	Québec	NDP
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—SouthGlengarry	Ontario	CPC
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	Québec	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	Québec	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	New Brunswick	Lib.
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	Québec	NDP
Leef, Ryan	Yukon	Yukon	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	Ontario	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	Ontario	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	Nova Scotia	NDP
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	Ontario	CPC
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	Québec	NDP
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	Ontario	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	Ontario	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	Saskatchewan	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	British Columbia	CPC
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	Ontario	CPC
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	Québec	NDP
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	Ontario	NDP
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	Manitoba	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	Ontario	NDP
Mathyssen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	Ontario	NDP
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	British Columbia	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	British Columbia	CPC
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Ontario	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	Ontario	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Ontario	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Ontario	Lib.
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo	British Columbia	CPC
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	Ontario	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	Alberta	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	Alberta	CPC
Michaud, Élaine	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	Québec	NDP
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Ontario	CPC
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.....	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	British Columbia	CPC
Moore, Hon. Rob	Fundy Royal	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	Québec	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	Québec	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	Québec	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude.....	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.....	Québec	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	Québec	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	Québec	NDP
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	British Columbia	Lib.
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	Québec	NDP
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	Ontario	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	Québec	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	Ontario	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	Ontario	CPC
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	Québec	NDP
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills....	Ontario	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East.....	Alberta	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	Ontario	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	Ontario	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre.....	Ontario	CPC
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel ..	Québec	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec.....	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable.....	Québec	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonquière—Alma	Québec	NDP
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat.....	Alberta	CPC
Péclét, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	Québec	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador.....	CPC
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	Québec	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	Québec	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	Québec	BQ
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	Ontario	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London ...	Ontario	CPC
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	Québec	NDP
Rae, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Ontario	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	Ontario	NDP
Raitt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	Ontario	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	Alberta	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	Alberta	CPC
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	Québec	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	Ontario	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	Alberta	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	Alberta	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	Alberta	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	Ontario	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	Saskatchewan	CPC
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	Québec	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	Québec	NDP
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	British Columbia	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	British Columbia	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	British Columbia	CPC
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Québec	Lib.
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	Saskatchewan	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	Ontario	CPC
Seebach, Kyle	Brampton West	Ontario	CPC
Sellah, Djaouda	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	Québec	NDP
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Ontario	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	Prince Edward Island	CPC
Shipley, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Ontario	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	Alberta	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	British Columbia	NDP
Sitsabaisesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	Ontario	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	Manitoba	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette	Manitoba	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	Alberta	CPC
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	Québec	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	Ontario	CPC
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	British Columbia	NDP
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	Nova Scotia	NDP
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	Alberta	CPC
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	British Columbia	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	Ontario	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	Ontario	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	Ontario	NDP
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	Ontario	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	Manitoba	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	Manitoba	CPC
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tremblay, Jonathan.....	Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord	Québec	NDP
Trost, Brad.....	Saskatoon—Humboldt.....	Saskatchewan	CPC
Trottier, Bernard.....	Etobicoke—Lakeshore.....	Ontario	CPC
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Québec	Lib.
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women.....	London North Centre	Ontario	CPC
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	Québec	NDP
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	Manitoba	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform).....	Edmonton—Sherwood Park....	Alberta	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	New Brunswick	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Ontario	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	Ontario	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	Ontario	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin.....	Saskatchewan	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	Ontario	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	British Columbia	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River.....	Alberta	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex.....	Ontario	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	British Columbia	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	New Brunswick	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia.....	British Columbia	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest....	New Brunswick	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	British Columbia	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	Ontario	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification)	Blackstrap	Saskatchewan	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville.....	Ontario	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	British Columbia	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River...	British Columbia	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth.....	Ontario	

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS BY PROVINCE

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALBERTA (28)		
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs)	Calgary—Nose Hill	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	CPC
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	CPC
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	CPC
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	NDP
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	CPC
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister	Calgary Southwest	CPC
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Edmonton Centre	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	CPC
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	CPC
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry	Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East	CPC
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	CPC
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	CPC
BRITISH COLUMBIA (36)		
Albas, Dan	Okanagan—Coquihalla	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	NDP
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	CPC
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	NDP
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	CPC
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission ..	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	CPC
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	CPC
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo	CPC
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	CPC
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	Lib.
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	CPC
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	NDP
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	NDP
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	CPC

MANITOBA (14)

Ashton, Niki	Churchill	NDP
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	CPC
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake	CPC
Bruinooge, Rod	Winnipeg South	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia ..	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface	CPC
Hoepner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Lib.
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette ..	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	CPC
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	CPC

NEW BRUNSWICK (10)

Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway	Fredericton	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	Lib.
Moore, Hon. Rob	Fundy Royal	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	CPC
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (7)		
Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Lib.
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Lib.
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	NDP
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Lib.
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Lib.
NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (1)		
Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	NDP
NOVA SCOTIA (11)		
Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley	CPC
Brison, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Lib.
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	NDP
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	CPC
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Lib.
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	NDP
NUNAVUT (1)		
Agluckkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	CPC
ONTARIO (105)		
Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs	Mississauga—Brampton South	CPC
Adler, Mark	York Centre	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	CPC
Allen, Malcolm	Welland	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook.....	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	CPC
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	CPC
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean.....	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril.....	Ottawa—Vanier	Lib.
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's	Lib.
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo.....	CPC
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora.....	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville.....	CPC
Calandra, Paul , Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	CPC
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	CPC
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	NDP
Charlton, Chris.....	Hamilton Mountain	NDP
Chisu, Cornelius	Pickering—Scarborough East	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	CPC
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	CPC
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh.....	NDP
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	CPC
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	CPC
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale.....	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	NDP
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Lib.
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	CPC
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	CPC
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	CPC
Gill, Parm	Brampton—Springdale	CPC
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton.....	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	NDP
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest.....	NDP
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Lib.
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	NDP
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	CPC
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	CPC
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	CPC
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	CPC
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	NDP
Mathyssen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	NDP
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Lib.
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	CPC
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	CPC
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	CPC
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre	CPC
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London	CPC
Rae, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	NDP
Raitt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	CPC
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	CPC
Seebach, Kyle	Brampton West	CPC
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Lib.
Shipley, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	CPC
Sitsabaiyan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	CPC
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND (4)

Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Lib.
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Lib.
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	CPC

QUÉBEC (75)

Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	NDP
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	BQ
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	CPC
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	NDP
Boulerice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	NDP
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	NDP
Caron, Guy	Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant	NDP
Choquette, François	Drummond	NDP
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Lib.
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Lib.
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	NDP
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	NDP
Dusseault, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	NDP
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Garnier, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Lib.
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	NDP
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	NDP
Hassainia, Sana	Verchères—Les Patriotes	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Mississquoi	NDP
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	NDP
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	CPC
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	NDP
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	NDP
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	NDP
Michaud, Élaine	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	NDP
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	NDP
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	NDP
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	NDP
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	NDP
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonquière—Alma	NDP
Péclet, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	NDP
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	BQ
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	NDP
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	NDP
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	NDP
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Lib.
Sellah, Djaouida	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	NDP
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	NDP
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	NDP
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Lib.
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	NDP
SASKATCHEWAN (14)		
Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	CPC
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	CPC
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Lib.
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	CPC
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	CPC
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification)	Blackstrap	CPC
YUKON (1)		
Leef, Ryan	Yukon	CPC

LIST OF STANDING AND SUB-COMMITTEES

(As of October 21, 2011 — 1st Session, 41st Parliament)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS AND NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Chair:

Chris Warkentin

Vice-Chairs:

Carolyn Bennett
Dennis Bevington

Ray Boughen
Rob Clarke
Linda Duncan

Jonathan Genest-Jourdain
LaVar Payne

John Rafferty
Greg Rickford

Kyle Seebach
David Wilks

(12)

Associate Members

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Harold Albrecht
Chris Alexander
Mike Allen
Dean Allison
Stella Ambler
Rob Anders
David Anderson
Charlie Angus
Scott Armstrong
Niki Ashton
Jay Aspin
Joyce Bateman
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James Bezan
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Peter Braid
Garry Breitkreuz
Gordon Brown
Lois Brown
Patrick Brown
Rod Bruinooge
Brad Butt
Paul Calandra
Blaine Calkins
Ron Cannan
John Carmichael
Colin Carrie
Corneliu Chisu
Michael Chong
Jean Crowder

Nathan Cullen
Joe Daniel
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Royal Galipeau
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Nina Grewal
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Laurie Hawn
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Russ Hiebert
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Randy Hoback
Candice Hoeppner
Ed Holder
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Roxanne James
Brian Jean
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Gerald Keddy
Greg Kerr

Ed Komarnicki
Daryl Kramp
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Ryan Leef
Kellie Leitch
Pierre Lemieux
Chungsen Leung
Wladyslaw Lizon
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Rob Merrifield
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Christine Moore
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Rick Norlock
Tilly O'Neill Gordon
Deepak Obhrai
Ted Opitz
Pierre Poilievre
Joe Preston
James Rajotte
Brent Rathgeber
Mathieu Ravignat
Scott Reid

Michelle Rempel
Blake Richards
Lee Richardson
Romeo Saganash
Andrew Saxton
Gary Schellenberger
Bev Shipley
Devinder Shory
Joy Smith
Robert Sopuck
Kevin Sorenson
Brian Storseth
Mark Strahl
David Sweet
David Tilson
Lawrence Toet
Brad Trost
Bernard Trottier
Susan Truppe
Merv Tweed
Dave Van Kesteren
Maurice Vellacott
Mike Wallace
Mark Warawa
Jeff Watson
John Weston
Rodney Weston
John Williamson
Stephen Woodworth
Terence Young
Wai Young
Bob Zimmer

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

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Charlie Angus Ruth Ellen Brosseau Brad Butt	Blaine Calkins John Carmichael	Dean Del Mastro Earl Dreessen	Pierre-Luc Dusseault Colin Mayes	(12)

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Eve Adams	Joe Daniel	Kellie Leitch	Gary Schellenberger
Mark Adler	Bob Dechert	Pierre Lemieux	Kyle Seeback
Dan Albas	Rick Dykstra	Chungsen Leung	Bev Shipley
Harold Albrecht	Wayne Easter	Wladyslaw Lizon	Devinder Shory
Chris Alexander	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Ben Lobb	Joy Smith
Mike Allen	Royal Galipeau	Tom Lukiwski	Robert Sopuck
Dean Allison	Cheryl Gallant	James Lunney	Kevin Sorenson
Stella Ambler	Parm Gill	Dave MacKenzie	Brian Storseth
Rob Anders	Shelly Glover	Pat Martin	Mark Strahl
David Anderson	Robert Goguen	Phil McColeman	David Sweet
Scott Armstrong	Peter Goldring	Cathy McLeod	David Tilson
Jay Aspin	Jacques Gourde	Costas Menegakis	Lawrence Toet
Joyce Bateman	Nina Grewal	Rob Merrifield	Brad Trost
Carolyn Bennett	Richard Harris	Larry Miller	Bernard Trottier
Leon Benoit	Laurie Hawn	Rob Moore	Susan Truppe
James Bezan	Bryan Hayes	Rick Norlock	Merv Tweed
Kelly Block	Jim Hillyer	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Dave Van Kesteren
Ray Bougouen	Randy Hoback	Deepak Obhrai	Maurice Vellacott
Peter Braid	Candice Hoeppner	Ted Opitz	Mike Wallace
Garry Breitkreuz	Ed Holder	LaVar Payne	Mark Warawa
Gordon Brown	Roxanne James	Pierre Poilievre	Chris Warkentin
Lois Brown	Brian Jean	Joe Preston	Jeff Watson
Patrick Brown	Peter Julian	James Rajotte	John Weston
Rod Bruinooge	Randy Kamp	Brent Rathgeber	Rodney Weston
Paul Calandra	Gerald Keddy	Scott Reid	David Wilks
Ron Cannan	Greg Kerr	Michelle Rempel	John Williamson
Colin Carrie	Ed Komarnicki	Blake Richards	Stephen Woodworth
Corneliu Chisu	Daryl Kramp	Lee Richardson	Terence Young
Michael Chong	Mike Lake	Greg Rickford	Wai Young
Rob Clarke	Guy Lauzon	Andrew Saxton	Bob Zimmer
Joe Comartin	Ryan Leef		

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

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Mark Adler	Joe Daniel	Ed Komarnicki	Andrew Saxton
Dan Albas	Patricia Davidson	Daryl Kramp	Gary Schellenberger
Harold Albrecht	Bob Dechert	Mike Lake	Kyle Seebach
Chris Alexander	Dean Del Mastro	Guy Lauzon	Bev Shipley
Mike Allen	Earl Dreessen	Ryan Leef	Devinder Shory
Dean Allison	Rick Dykstra	Kellie Leitch	Joy Smith
Stella Ambler	Wayne Easter	Chungsen Leung	Robert Sopuck
Rob Anders	Mark Eyking	Wladyslaw Lizon	Kevin Sorenson
David Anderson	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Tom Lukowski	Mark Strahl
Scott Armstrong	Mylène Freeman	James Lunney	David Sweet
Jay Aspin	Hedy Fry	Dave MacKenzie	David Tilson
Joyce Bateman	Royal Galipeau	Pat Martin	Lawrence Toet
Leon Benoit	Cheryl Gallant	Colin Mayes	Brad Trost
James Bezan	Parm Gill	Phil McColeman	Bernard Trottier
Kelly Block	Shelly Glover	Cathy McLeod	Susan Truppe
Ray Boughen	Robert Goguen	Costas Menegakis	Merv Tweed
Peter Braid	Peter Goldring	Rob Merrifield	Dave Van Kesteren
Garry Breitkreuz	Jacques Gourde	Rob Moore	Maurice Vellacott
Gordon Brown	Nina Grewal	Rick Norlock	Mike Wallace
Lois Brown	Richard Harris	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Mark Warawa
Patrick Brown	Laurie Hawn	Deepak Obhrai	Chris Warkentin
Rod Bruinooge	Bryan Hayes	Ted Opitz	Jeff Watson
Brad Butt	Russ Hiebert	Pierre Poilievre	John Weston
Paul Calandra	Jim Hillyer	Joe Preston	Rodney Weston
Blaine Calkins	Candice Hoeppner	James Rajotte	David Wilks
Ron Cannan	Ed Holder	Brent Rathgeber	John Williamson
John Carmichael	Roxanne James	Scott Reid	Stephen Woodworth
Colin Carrie	Brian Jean	Michelle Rempel	Terence Young
Corneliu Chisu	Randy Kamp	Blake Richards	Wai Young
Michael Chong	Gerald Keddy	Lee Richardson	

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Scott Armstrong Tyrone Benskin Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet	Gordon Brown Paul Calandra	Andrew Cash Parm Gill	Jim Hillyer Terence Young

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Dan Albas	Dean Del Mastro	Guy Lauzon	Kyle Seeback
Harold Albrecht	Pierre Dionne Labelle	Ryan Leef	Bev Shipley
Chris Alexander	Earl Dreessen	Kellie Leitch	Devinder Shory
Mike Allen	Rick Dykstra	Pierre Lemieux	Joy Smith
Dean Allison	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Chungsen Leung	Robert Sopuck
Stella Ambler	Mylène Freeman	Wladyslaw Lizon	Kevin Sorenson
Rob Anders	Hedy Fry	Ben Lobb	Brian Storseth
David Anderson	Royal Galipeau	Tom Lukiwski	Mark Strahl
Charlie Angus	Cheryl Gallant	James Lunney	David Sweet
Jay Aspin	Shelly Glover	Dave MacKenzie	David Tilson
Joyce Bateman	Robert Goguen	Colin Mayes	Lawrence Toet
Mauril Bélanger	Peter Goldring	Phil McColeman	Brad Trost
Leon Benoit	Jacques Gourde	Cathy McLeod	Bernard Trottier
James Bezan	Nina Grewal	Costas Menegakis	Justin Trudeau
Kelly Block	Richard Harris	Rob Merrifield	Susan Truppe
Ray Bougheen	Laurie Hawn	Larry Miller	Merv Tweed
Peter Braid	Bryan Hayes	Rick Norlock	Dave Van Kesteren
Garry Breitkreuz	Russ Hiebert	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Maurice Vellacott
Lois Brown	Randy Hoback	Deepak Obhrai	Mike Wallace
Patrick Brown	Candice Hoepnner	Ted Opitz	Mark Warawa
Rod Bruinooge	Ed Holder	LaVar Payne	Chris Warkentin
Brad Butt	Bruce Hyer	Pierre Poilievre	Jeff Watson
Blaine Calkins	Roxanne James	Joe Preston	John Weston
Ron Cannan	Brian Jean	James Rajotte	Rodney Weston
John Carmichael	Peter Julian	Brent Rathgeber	David Wilks
Colin Carrie	Randy Kamp	Scott Reid	John Williamson
Corneliu Chisu	Jim Karygiannis	Michelle Rempel	Stephen Woodworth
Michael Chong	Gerald Keddy	Blake Richards	Wai Young
Rob Clarke	Greg Kerr	Lee Richardson	Bob Zimmer
Joe Daniel	Ed Komarnicki	Greg Rickford	

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Chair:

David Tilson

Vice-Chairs:Don Davies
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Sadia Groguhé
Roxanne JamesMatthew Kellway
Chungsen LeungCostas Menegakis
Ted OpitzRathika Sitsabaiesan
John Weston

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Joyce Bateman
Leon Benoit
James Bezan
Kelly Block
Ray Boughen
Peter Braid
Garry Breitkreuz
Gordon Brown
Lois Brown
Patrick Brown
Rod Bruinooge
Brad Butt
Paul Calandra
Blaine Calkins
Ron Cannan
John Carmichael
Colin Carrie
Corneliu Chisu
Michael Chong

Olivia Chow
Rob Clarke
Joe Daniel
Patricia Davidson
Bob Dechert
Dean Del Mastro
Earl Dreessen
Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay
Hedy Fry
Royal Galipeau
Cheryl Gallant
Parm Gill
Shelly Glover
Robert Goguen
Peter Goldring
Jacques Gourde
Nina Grewal
Richard Harris
Laurie Hawn
Bryan Hayes
Russ Hiebert
Jim Hillyer
.Randy Hoback
Candice Hoeppner
Ed Holder
Brian Jean
Peter Julian
Randy Kamp
Jim Karygiannis
Gerald Keddy
Greg Kerr

Ed Komarnicki
Daryl Kramp
Mike Lake
Guy Lauzon
Ryan Leef
Kellie Leitch
Pierre Lemieux
Wladyslaw Lizon
Ben Lobb
Tom Lukiwski
James Lunney
Dave MacKenzie
Colin Mayes
Phil McColeman
Cathy McLeod
Rob Merrifield
Larry Miller
Rob Moore
Rick Norlock
Tilly O'Neill Gordon
Deepak Obhrai
LaVar Payne
Pierre Poilievre
Joe Preston
James Rajotte
Brent Rathgeber
Scott Reid
Michelle Rempel
Blake Richards
Lee Richardson
Greg Rickford

Andrew Saxton
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Bev Shipley
Devinder Shory
Joy Smith
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Mark Strahl
David Sweet
Lawrence Toet
Brad Trost
Bernard Trottier
Justin Trudeau
Susan Truppe
Merv Tweed
Dave Van Kesteren
Maurice Vellacott
Mike Wallace
Mark Warawa
Chris Warkentin
Jeff Watson
Rodney Weston
David Wilks
John Williamson
Stephen Woodworth
Terence Young
Wai Young
Bob Zimmer

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Chair:	Mark Warawa	Vice-Chairs:	Kirsty Duncan Megan Leslie	
Stella Ambler Bruce Hyer Laurin Liu	James Lunney Michelle Rempel	Robert Sopuck Lise St-Denis	Lawrence Toet Stephen Woodworth	(12)

Associate Members

Eve Adams	Nathan Cullen	Ed Komarnicki	Lee Richardson
Mark Adler	Joe Daniel	Daryl Kramp	Greg Rickford
Dan Albas	Patricia Davidson	Mike Lake	Andrew Saxton
Harold Albrecht	Bob Dechert	Guy Lauzon	Francis Scarpaleggia
Chris Alexander	Dean Del Mastro	Ryan Leef	Gary Schellenberger
Mike Allen	Stéphane Dion	Kellie Leitch	Kyle Seeback
Dean Allison	Earl Dreessen	Pierre Lemieux	Bev Shipley
Rob Anders	Linda Duncan	Chungsen Leung	Devinder Shory
David Anderson	Rick Dykstra	Wladyslaw Lizon	Jinny Jogindera Sims
Scott Armstrong	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Ben Lobb	Joy Smith
Jay Aspin	Royal Galipeau	Tom Lukiwski	Kevin Sorenson
Joyce Bateman	Cheryl Gallant	Dave MacKenzie	Brian Storseth
Leon Benoit	Parm Gill	Colin Mayes	Mark Strahl
Dennis Bevington	Shelly Glover	Phil McColeman	David Sweet
James Bezan	Robert Goguen	Cathy McLeod	David Tilson
Kelly Block	Peter Goldring	Costas Menegakis	Brad Trost
Ray Boughen	Jacques Gourde	Rob Merrifield	Bernard Trottier
Peter Braid	Nina Grewal	Larry Miller	Susan Truppe
Garry Breitkreuz	Richard Harris	Rob Moore	Merv Tweed
Gordon Brown	Laurie Hawn	Joyce Murray	Dave Van Kesteren
Lois Brown	Bryan Hayes	Rick Norlock	Maurice Vellacott
Patrick Brown	Russ Hiebert	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Mike Wallace
Rod Bruinooge	Jim Hillyer	Deepak Obhrai	Chris Warkentin
Brad Butt	Randy Hoback	Ted Opitz	Jeff Watson
Paul Calandra	Candice Hoepner	LaVar Payne	John Weston
Blaine Calkins	Ed Holder	Pierre Poilievre	Rodney Weston
Ron Cannan	Roxanne James	Joe Preston	David Wilks
John Carmichael	Brian Jean	James Rajotte	John Williamson
Colin Carrie	Peter Julian	Brent Rathgeber	Terence Young
Corneliu Chisu	Randy Kamp	Scott Reid	Wai Young
Michael Chong	Gerald Keddy	Blake Richards	Bob Zimmer
Rob Clarke	Greg Kerr		

FINANCE

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Mark Adler Alain Giguère Shelly Glover	Randy Hoback Brian Jean	Wayne Marston Cathy McLeod	Peggy Nash Dave Van Kesteren

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Associate Members

Eve Adams	Joe Daniel	Kellie Leitch	Kyle Seebach
Dan Albas	Patricia Davidson	Pierre Lemieux	Judy Sgro
Harold Albrecht	Bob Dechert	Chungsen Leung	Bev Shipley
Chris Alexander	Dean Del Mastro	Wladyslaw Lizon	Devinder Shory
Mike Allen	Earl Dreessen	Ben Lobb	Jinny Jogindera Sims
Dean Allison	Rick Dykstra	Tom Lukiwski	Joy Smith
Stella Ambler	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	James Lunney	Robert Sopuck
Rob Anders	Royal Galipeau	Dave MacKenzie	Kevin Sorenson
David Anderson	Cheryl Gallant	Colin Mayes	Brian Storseth
Scott Armstrong	Parm Gill	John McCallum	Mark Strahl
Jay Aspin	Robert Goguen	Phil McColeman	David Sweet
Joyce Bateman	Peter Goldring	Costas Menegakis	Glenn Thibeault
Leon Benoit	Jacques Gourde	Rob Merrifield	David Tilson
James Bezan	Nina Grewal	Larry Miller	Lawrence Toet
Kelly Block	Richard Harris	Rob Moore	Brad Trost
Ray Boughen	Laurie Hawn	Rick Norlock	Bernard Trottier
Tarik Brahmi	Bryan Hayes	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Susan Truppe
Peter Braid	Russ Hiebert	Deepak Obhrai	Merv Tweed
Garry Breitkreuz	Jim Hillyer	Ted Opitz	Maurice Vellacott
Gordon Brown	Candice Hoeppner	Massimo Pacetti	Mike Wallace
Lois Brown	Ed Holder	LaVar Payne	Mark Warawa
Patrick Brown	Bruce Hyer	Pierre Poilievre	Chris Warkentin
Rod Bruinooge	Roxanne James	Joe Preston	Jeff Watson
Brad Butt	Peter Julian	Brent Rathgeber	John Weston
Paul Calandra	Randy Kamp	Scott Reid	Rodney Weston
Blaine Calkins	Gerald Keddy	Michelle Rempel	David Wilks
Ron Cannan	Greg Kerr	Blake Richards	John Williamson
John Carmichael	Ed Komarnicki	Lee Richardson	Stephen Woodworth
Colin Carrie	Daryl Kramp	Greg Rickford	Terence Young
Corneliu Chisu	Mike Lake	Andrew Saxton	Wai Young
Michael Chong	Guy Lauzon	Gary Schellenberger	Bob Zimmer
Rob Clarke	Ryan Leef		

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Mike Allen Ryan Cleary Patricia Davidson	Rosane Doré Lefebvre Bryan Hayes	Randy Kamp Ryan Leef	Robert Sopuck Jonathan Tremblay

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Associate Members

Eve Adams	Roger Cuzner	Guy Lauzon	Andrew Saxton
Mark Adler	Joe Daniel	Kellie Leitch	Gary Schellenberger
Dan Albas	Bob Dechert	Pierre Lemieux	Kyle Seeback
Harold Albrecht	Dean Del Mastro	Chungsen Leung	Bev Shipley
Chris Alexander	Earl Dreessen	Wladyslaw Lizon	Devinder Shory
Dean Allison	Rick Dykstra	Ben Lobb	Joy Smith
Stella Ambler	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Tom Lukiwski	Kevin Sorenson
Rob Anders	Royal Galipeau	James Lunney	Peter Stoffer
David Anderson	Cheryl Gallant	Dave MacKenzie	Brian Storseth
Scott Armstrong	Parm Gill	Colin Mayes	Mark Strahl
Jay Aspin	Shelly Glover	Phil McColeman	David Sweet
Joyce Bateman	Yvon Godin	Cathy McLeod	David Tilson
Leon Benoit	Robert Goguen	Costas Menegakis	Lawrence Toet
James Bezan	Peter Goldring	Rob Merrifield	Philip Toone
Kelly Block	Jacques Gourde	Larry Miller	Brad Trost
Ray Boughey	Nina Grewal	Rob Moore	Bernard Trottier
Peter Braid	Richard Harris	Joyce Murray	Susan Truppe
Garry Breitkreuz	Laurie Hawn	Rick Norlock	Merv Tweed
Gordon Brown	Russ Hiebert	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Dave Van Kesteren
Lois Brown	Jim Hillyer	Deepak Obhrai	Maurice Vellacott
Patrick Brown	Randy Hoback	Ted Opitz	Mike Wallace
Rod Bruinooge	Candice Hoeppner	LaVar Payne	Mark Warawa
Brad Butt	Ed Holder	Pierre Poilievre	Chris Warkentin
Gerry Byrne	Roxanne James	Joe Preston	Jeff Watson
Paul Calandra	Brian Jean	James Rajotte	John Weston
Blaine Calkins	Peter Julian	Brent Rathgeber	David Wilks
Ron Cannan	Gerald Keddy	Scott Reid	John Williamson
John Carmichael	Greg Kerr	Michelle Rempel	Stephen Woodworth
Colin Carrie	Ed Komarnicki	Blake Richards	Terence Young
Corneliu Chisu	Daryl Kramp	Lee Richardson	Wai Young
Michael Chong	Mike Lake	Greg Rickford	Bob Zimmer
Rob Clarke			

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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Dean Allison

Vice-Chairs:

Hélène Laverdière
Dominic LeBlanc

Paulina Ayala
Lois Brown
Bob Dechert

Peter Goldring
Nina Grewal

Marc-André Morin
Gary Schellenberger

Jinny Jogindera Sims
Dave Van Kesteren

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Associate Members

Eve Adams
Mark Adler
Dan Albas
Harold Albrecht
Chris Alexander
Mike Allen
Stella Ambler
Rob Anders
David Anderson
Scott Armstrong
Jay Aspin
Joyce Bateman
Leon Benoit
James Bezan
Kelly Block
Ray Boughen
Peter Braid
Garry Breitkreuz
Gordon Brown
Patrick Brown
Rod Bruinooge
Brad Butt
Paul Calandra
Blaine Calkins
Ron Cannan
John Carmichael
Colin Carrie
Corneliu Chisu
Michael Chong
Rob Clarke
Irwin Cotler
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Patricia Davidson
Dean Del Mastro
Earl Dreessen
Rick Dykstra
Mark Eyking
Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay
Royal Galipeau
Cheryl Gallant
Parm Gill
Shelly Glover
Robert Goguen
Jacques Gourde
Richard Harris
Laurie Hawn
Bryan Hayes
Russ Hiebert
Jim Hillyer
Randy Hoback
Candice Hoepnner
Ed Holder
Roxanne James
Brian Jean
Peter Julian
Randy Kamp
Gerald Keddy
Greg Kerr
Ed Komarnicki
Daryl Kramp
Mike Lake
Guy Lauzon
Ryan Leef
Kellie Leitch

Pierre Lemieux
Chungsen Leung
Wladyslaw Lizon
Ben Lobb
Tom Lukowski
James Lunney
Dave MacKenzie
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Brian Masse
Colin Mayes
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Cathy McLeod
Costas Menegakis
Rob Merrifield
Larry Miller
Rob Moore
Rick Norlock
Tilly O'Neill Gordon
Deepak Obhrai
Ted Opitz
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Lawrence Toet
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Bernard Trottier
Susan Truppe
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Mike Wallace
Mark Warawa
Chris Warkentin
Jeff Watson
John Weston
Rodney Weston
David Wilks
John Williamson
Stephen Woodworth
Terence Young
Wai Young
Bob Zimmer

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS

Chair:

Scott Reid

Vice-Chairs:

Irwin Cotler
Wayne Marston

Nina Grewal

Russ Hiebert

Ève Péclet

David Sweet

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GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

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Scott Armstrong	Alexandre Boulerice	Ron Cannan	Mathieu Ravignat	
Denis Blanchette	Peter Braid	Jacques Gourde	Bernard Trottier	(12)
Associate Members				
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Mark Adler	Earl Dreessen	Chungseng Leung	Andrew Saxton	
Dan Albas	Rick Dykstra	Wladyslaw Lizon	Gary Schellenberger	
Harold Albrecht	Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay	Ben Lobb	Kyle Seeback	
Chris Alexander	Royal Galipeau	Tom Lukiwski	Bev Shipley	
Mike Allen	Cheryl Gallant	James Lunney	Devinder Shory	
Dean Allison	Parm Gill	Dave MacKenzie	Joy Smith	
Stella Ambler	Shelly Glover	Colin Mayes	Robert Sopuck	
Rob Anders	Robert Goguen	Phil McColeman	Kevin Sorenson	
David Anderson	Peter Goldring	John McKay	Brian Storseth	
Jay Aspin	Nina Grewal	Cathy McLeod	Mark Strahl	
Joyce Bateman	Richard Harris	Costas Menegakis	David Sweet	
Leon Benoit	Laurie Hawn	Rob Merrifield	David Tilson	
James Bezan	Bryan Hayes	Larry Miller	Lawrence Toet	
Ray Boughey	Russ Hiebert	Rob Moore	Brad Trost	
Garry Breitkreuz	Jim Hillyer	Rick Norlock	Susan Truppe	
Gordon Brown	Randy Hoback	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Merv Tweed	
Lois Brown	Candice Hoeppner	Deepak Obhrai	Dave Van Kesteren	
Patrick Brown	Ed Holder	Ted Opitz	Maurice Vellacott	
Rod Bruinooge	Roxanne James	Massimo Pacetti	Mark Warawa	
Brad Butt	Brian Jean	LaVar Payne	Chris Warkentin	
Paul Calandra	Peter Julian	Pierre Poilievre	Jeff Watson	
Blaine Calkins	Randy Kamp	Joe Preston	John Weston	
John Carmichael	Gerald Keddy	James Rajotte	Rodney Weston	
Colin Carrie	Greg Kerr	Brent Rathgeber	David Wilks	
Corneliu Chisu	Ed Komarnicki	Geoff Regan	John Williamson	
Michael Chong	Daryl Kramp	Scott Reid	Stephen Woodworth	
Rob Clarke	Mike Lake	Michelle Rempel	Terence Young	
Joe Daniel	Guy Lauzon	Blake Richards	Wai Young	
Patricia Davidson	Ryan Leef	Lee Richardson	Bob Zimmer	
Bob Dechert	Kellie Leitch			

HEALTH

Chair:

Joy Smith

Vice-Chairs:

Libby Davies
Hedy Fry

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 035 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, October 24, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 24, 2011

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1105)

[English]

BREAST DENSITY AWARENESS ACT

Mr. Patrick Brown (Barrie, CPC) moved that Bill C-314, An Act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-314, An Act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue, which calls on the federal government to encourage the use of existing federal initiatives in order to increase awareness among Canadian women about the impact of having dense breast tissue and the complications it poses for breast cancer screening.

Breast cancer touches many Canadian women and their families and friends, and is the most common form of cancer in women. I know this is something Canadians from coast to coast to coast care deeply about. Just last month Barrie held its annual CIBC Run for the Cure in support of breast cancer research. I saw 2,000 residents out early on a cold and wet Sunday morning to support the battle against breast cancer. Runs like that occur across the country because Canadians are deeply concerned.

In my community of Barrie, in less than 12 months, the Royal Victoria Hospital's regional cancer care centre will open. There have been literally thousands of fundraising events over the last five years to support this very large cancer centre. It will help battle a variety of cancers, including of course, breast cancer.

This year it is estimated that about 23,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and 5,000 women will die from this insidious disease. Over their lifetime, one in nine women will be diagnosed with breast cancer. This is very difficult to accept. It touches many women and their loved ones. Sixty-four Canadian women will be diagnosed with breast cancer and 14 will die of breast cancer every day. It is my sincere hope that over time this bill will help reduce those troubling numbers. Health sectors in other areas of the world are beginning to more aggressively target dense tissue to enable early detection of breast cancer.

It is important for all of us to be aware of the fact that screening for breast cancer can save lives. Providing women with accurate information about screening will help them make decisions that are right for them. The federal government supports a number of initiatives to support Canadians dealing with cancer.

Bill C-314 aims to raise awareness about dense breast tissue and breast cancer screening. It will help women and their doctors make well-informed decisions regarding breast cancer screening. It includes a number of elements, which I will briefly outline. I will also address initiatives currently under way to address them.

First, this bill requires the Government of Canada to assess whether gaps in information exist relating to breast density in the context of breast cancer screening. Second, this bill requires that approaches be identified, where needed, to improve information for women in order to: one, address the challenges of detecting breast cancer in women with dense breast tissue; and two, raise awareness concerning these challenges. Third, the bill requires the existing Canadian breast cancer screening initiative to share information on dense breast tissue and its relationship to breast cancer screening and any follow-up procedures that may be deemed necessary.

Canada is fortunate to have screening programs for breast cancer. The provinces and territories deliver these programs to detect breast cancer before it has spread so that treatment can be started. We are learning more and more from scientific research about breast cancer and its risk factors. New and better treatments are being developed. However, there is still much to learn. We know that good information is fundamental to the decisions that each of us makes with the advice of our doctors about our own health. This dialogue is the key to doctor-patient relationships.

Let me take a few moments to explain how the issue of breast density relates to breast cancer screening. First, breast density refers to the amount of tissue in the breast. Dense breasts have more tissue. Breast cancer screening is done using a mammogram, which is an X-ray of the breast. A woman's breast density can affect the accuracy of a mammogram and it may be more difficult for a doctor to see an abnormality. There could be cancer present if the breast tissue is dense because both cancer and dense breast tissue appear white on mammograms.

Private Members' Business

High breast density is also linked to an increased risk of developing breast cancer, although it is not yet known why this is the case. We also do not know how common dense breast tissue is among Canadian women, although some statistics point to the fact that it could be as high as 40%. Providing women with information of what is known about breast density would help them make well-informed decisions about screening and would open the door for women to engage in follow-up procedures, such as an MRI or ultrasound, if they have dense breast tissue which could skew the mammogram.

• (1110)

In addition to raising awareness on breast density, the bill recognizes the responsibility of the provinces and territories for providing breast cancer screening. Provincial and territorial breast screening programs are invaluable in the early detection of breast cancer in Canadian women.

As noted in the bill, the federal government plays a role in breast cancer screening by facilitating the identification and adoption of effective practices in screening. We also support the sharing of information on screening methods and outcomes through our federal roles in research and surveillance.

Through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, our government provides funding to researchers to investigate the full spectrum of cancer prevention and control. One of the priorities of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research is early detection of cancer. The CIHR works with partners both nationally and internationally to advance its research priorities, including breast cancer research.

Our government has demonstrated its commitment to breast cancer screening by investing in the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative. We work with provincial and territorial governments to measure the performance of breast cancer screening programs across Canada. This means that all jurisdictions regularly share information on the screening programs and discuss what they are learning. They share best practices, discuss the challenges they are facing and the questions that are important to all of them.

Information sharing about ways to improve these programs ensures that women receive the full benefits of early detection. This includes providing women with information about all aspects of breast cancer screening. The federal, provincial and territorial national committee for the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative provides opportunities for provincial and territorial governments to work together to develop their screening recommendations and approaches. This committee is comprised of medical professionals and key stakeholders.

For example, the committee is currently looking at breast cancer mortality and improving screening for underserviced populations. We have the Canadian breast cancer screening database, which is a source of valuable information on breast cancer screening. Participating provincial and territorial screening programs contribute to the national database, which is used to monitor and evaluate breast cancer screening programs. Non-government organizations play a vital role in this process as well.

I am proud to say that our government is taking action on cancer through our continued investment in the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer which has led to the implementation of the Canadian strategy for cancer control. The partnership is the first of its kind and was established by our Conservative government. It covers the full spectrum of cancer control, from prevention to palliative and end-of-life care, policy to practice, and from research to health system applications.

Together with the cancer community, the partnership is accelerating the use of effective cancer prevention and control strategies. Its objectives are to reduce the number of cancer cases, minimize cancer-related deaths and improve patient quality of life.

In March of this year, our Prime Minister announced renewed funding of \$250 million over five years, beginning on April 1, 2012. This will allow the partnership to continue its invaluable work. In the words of the Prime Minister:

We are making progress on prevention, diagnosis, treatment and hope, and in tracking our progress closely, the partnership is leading us on the path to a cure.

The partnership plays a key role in providing information to women on cancer screening, which aligns with the spirit of this bill. The bill also recognizes the important role of organizations such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation in providing reliable information that supports women in making decisions about their health.

All of us are familiar with the Canadian Cancer Society. This national volunteer organization works in cancer prevention, research, advocacy, information and support for all cancers.

The Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation is a national volunteer organization dedicated to working toward a future without breast cancer. The foundation funds, supports and advocates for research, education and awareness programs, early diagnosis and effective treatment, as well as a positive quality of life for those living with breast cancer.

Women's health organizations, such as the Canadian Women's Health Network, raise awareness on many health issues faced by women in Canada, including breast cancer.

Working with the above-listed breast cancer stakeholders, the federal government will continue to raise awareness through existing initiatives on the issue of breast density in the context of breast cancer screening. These stakeholders will be very critical in our battle to raise awareness about breast density.

This bill is particularly timely given that October is breast cancer awareness month. Through efforts to raise awareness, Canadian women and their families can become more informed about breast cancer. They will learn about breast density and its implications for breast cancer screening. They will be able to make well-informed decisions based on this knowledge.

• (1115)

I would like to thank Andrea Paine at the Ministry of Health in Ottawa, Dr. Rob Ballagh of Barrie, Mike Richmond from Toronto, and my assistant in Barrie, Shawn Bubel, for their assistance in the drafting of the bill.

Private Members' Business

The bill provides an opportunity for the Government of Canada and the House to recognize the critical importance of raising awareness about breast density and breast cancer screening.

It would be an honour for me to have the support of all members in the House for this bill. Too many families have been touched by this form of cancer. I am hopeful that by ensuring women get the information they need which could lead to early detection, this legislation could potentially save lives.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to congratulate my colleague opposite for his interest in and his work on the fight against breast cancer, particularly cancer in those with dense breast tissue.

To promote breast cancer awareness and prevention, should the government not work with the provinces and territories to reduce the wait times for diagnostic tests and improve access to X-rays in the public health care system?

This would give disadvantaged women better, earlier and fairer access to the breast cancer screening program, since diagnostic X-ray testing is sometimes carried out in private clinics.

[*English*]

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, I am very proud that this government has worked closely with the provinces and territories to assist in enhancing health care in Canada. Let us not forget that this is the highest level of health care funding in our history to the provinces and territories through this federal government. With an increase of 6% a year we have seen record investments in health care in all areas.

The bill sets out that we would work with the provinces and territories on enhancing the breast cancer screening protocols. I am very proud of what this government has done on health care. It is not limited just to the support for the provinces and territories in this new investment, but with the Canadian cancer partnership and a variety of other partnerships this government again and again does whatever it can to enhance health care in Canada.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the recommended initial age for breast screening as well as the frequency for screening changes from study to study. It also changes from province to territory.

How does a woman know that she is getting the initial screening and the frequency of screening according to need as opposed to according to what a province or territory wants to pay for?

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the benefits of the bill. It encourages the sharing and pooling of information. There is a variety of standards, but now with the provinces, territories and the federal government working on the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative, we will start to see more of a balance in terms of protocols.

I also note that the Government of Canada is investing in the CIHR for breast cancer screening. The CIHR has made that an area of interest. There are a lot of things we do not know in terms of breast cancer. That is why the research done by the CIHR is critical, as is having an active dialogue with the provinces, territories and the federal government on breast cancer. Research and surveillance are

going to be very much needed as we embark on this battle against breast cancer.

• (1120)

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Barrie for bringing this very important issue to the House. I have three adult daughters. My wife and I were talking about this the other day because of the CIBC breast cancer walk. It is phenomenal to see the number of women who have been able to be screened and have mammograms, and have moved into a new kind of life because of breast cancer.

Why has this not taken place already? Why has it come to this stage? We know there is so much information available. Maybe he could enlighten us as to why it is at this stage and what the process is to get this legislation through the House.

Mr. Patrick Brown: Mr. Speaker, we are learning more and more about breast cancer all the time. While it was not clear before, I know that in the U.S. and a few other jurisdictions they realized there were challenges with the screening due to the fact that dense breast tissue was skewing mammogram results. Possibly as high as 40% of females have dense breast tissue, which is a huge per cent of the population that we would have inadequate information on from a mammogram. Other health care jurisdictions are embarking on new screening initiatives, and this is an opportunity for us to learn from each other. Adopting more effective practices would be a very positive step for the Canadian fight against breast cancer.

In terms of why this has not happened before, it is just that we had not learned about it before. This is something that Health Canada was looking into and it is something that was only started last year in the United States. This is something that was identified as a potential area where we could improve breast cancer screening. It is certainly worthy of the House to look into, if it could potentially save lives of 23,000 females who are, unfortunately, diagnosed with breast cancer every year.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, breast cancer is one of the most common illnesses among Canadian women. In 2011, an estimated 23,000 women will be diagnosed with breast cancer, and more than 5,000 women will die of it. On average, 64 Canadian women a day learn that they have breast cancer.

Private Members' Business

A breast cancer diagnosis forever alters the lives of these women. First, there is the fear and anxiety that accompanies the tests, and then chemotherapy becomes a part of their everyday lives. They must miss work and find someone to help take care of their children. Sometimes, a diagnosis can mean surgery and the loss of a breast, along with all of the pain associated with that harsh reality. There is also the exorbitant cost of medications and the red tape of insurance companies. And then there are the women who have no insurance at all and must make sacrifices to get the essential medications they need to fight this illness.

Women need support for the duration of this process. I would like to acknowledge the initiative of the member for Barrie. It is remarkable that a man, who will probably never suffer from this disease, wants to get involved. However, this bill is incomplete. It is but a modest band-aid solution to a serious and complex disease. This bill would encourage the use of existing initiatives. In my opinion, we must do more. Although breast density may be a significant risk factor, it is nevertheless just one factor to be taken into consideration.

First, what is breast density? The member opposite explained it very well. Dense breasts have more connective tissue, glands and ducts. When a woman has a mammogram, the dense tissue appears white, the same colour as cancerous lumps, which can result in a false diagnosis. Other, more precise tests are then recommended. Better results are obtained for these women with magnetic resonance imaging, for example.

However, we must be cautious. Breast density only affects a small number of women. Focusing only on this aspect of the disease will not help improve cancer screening throughout Canada. This bill abandons all other women, the majority, who need better screening and health care measures. I would like to explain what would really make a difference in the fight against breast cancer.

First, the reality is that many women will not discover in time that they have breast cancer, simply because they do not have access to a family doctor, who is often the first contact in the health system. The family doctor knows the patient's history, weight and general health, and asks questions about the patient's lifestyle, nutrition, and so forth. The family doctor does the annual exam and may detect symptoms of the disease or an unusual lump in the breast. He or she may refer the patient to a specialist for tests and further investigation.

More than 5 million Canadians still do not have a family doctor. For years, the people of this country have been calling on governments to address the shortage of doctors. What is the federal government doing? Nothing. My colleagues and I have proposed numerous measures to fix this important issue. One significant way to help would be to work with the provinces to increase the number of spaces in universities in order to train an additional 1,200 doctors. Multidisciplinary teams should also be established to improve screening and patient care.

For example, at the Centre hospitalier de l'Université de Montréal, general practitioners, oncologists, nurses and radiologists work together to treat patients. Early detection has increased because there is constant communication between the various health professionals. In addition, treatment includes psychological services as well as support for relatives.

Second, breast cancer screening is not routine in Canada. Programs are sometimes inadequate or completely non-existent, as is sadly the case in Nunavut. However, specialists are telling us that the earlier the diagnosis, the higher the woman's chances of survival. Studies have shown that women are at a higher risk of developing the disease after the age of 40. The Province of Quebec implemented a routine screening program a few years ago. The program targets women between the ages of 50 and 69, and involves getting a mammogram. Every two years, women are contacted by the department and are encouraged to get tested. The program is fully covered by the Régie de l'assurance-maladie du Québec. According to statistics from Quebec's Department of Health and Social Services, breast cancer mortality rates in participating women dropped by at least 25% between 1996 and 2006.

The federal government should take the lead on this and work with the provinces and territories to ensure stable funding for routine screening programs for women 40 and over. In doing so, lives would be saved.

• (1125)

Thirdly, another major problem is access to diagnostic tests within a reasonable timeframe. New investments in imaging equipment have increased the number of scanners available, but have not necessarily led to shorter wait times, or so says the Health Council of Canada in its May 2011 report. Between 2008 and 2010, wait times for these scans decreased in Alberta and Prince Edward Island and increased in Ontario. Governments continue to face challenges in collecting data on wait times for diagnostic imaging, in part because many scans are done outside hospitals in free-standing clinics.

There is also the question of public coverage for diagnostic testing. Some provinces cover diagnostic tests and others do not. Some provinces provide coverage at hospitals only. In Quebec, for example, tests are covered only if they are done in a hospital. Nonetheless, patients can pay out of pocket to get tested at free-standing clinics. These private-sector tests are done by radiologists who also work in public-sector hospitals, which increases the wait times and creates two classes of people: those who have the means to pay for diagnostic tests and those who do not, the less fortunate. A number of doctors in Quebec, including the MQRP —also known as Canadian Doctors for Medicare—condemn this double standard.

A federal fund for improving public coverage of diagnostic tests, included in the next health report, is certainly one solution to consider. Establishing Canada-wide standards to improve breast cancer screening for certain women, namely women with dense breast tissue, is a concrete measure that would truly help these women. Is the government prepared to commit to such solutions? I hope so.

Private Members' Business

This government has been very lax when it comes to protecting and funding the public system. Under the pretext that health falls under provincial jurisdiction, the Conservatives clearly seem to think that the best thing to do is nothing at all. However, the federal government is responsible for working with the provinces to improve the health of all Canadians. Do the members opposite need to be reminded that one of the principles of the Canada Health Act is universality. People consider equal access to health care to be a right of citizenship, not a privilege for only the most fortunate.

Fourth, the cost of medication is a serious obstacle to cancer treatment. What is the point of improving breast cancer information and screening if women cannot afford to buy the medication they need to be cured? While the health care system provides cancer-treating drugs in hospitals, half the new treatments are taken at home and patients are therefore responsible for paying for them. A lack of insurance means enormous costs for patients and their families given that the average cost of treatment for new cancer-fighting drugs is exorbitant at \$65,000. Some people do not have insurance since they do not have the money to pay for a private policy.

Under the current health accord, which was signed in 2004, the federal and provincial governments agreed to create options for catastrophic pharmaceutical coverage. Since then, nothing has been done. What is the federal government waiting for to resolve this issue? Does the government have no idea how to reduce the cost of medication?

I have a few ideas. First, make better use our negotiating power when purchasing pharmaceuticals, specifically by joining with all the provinces and territories to buy in bulk. After all, there is strength in numbers. Second, reduce the administrative costs by making use of the public system. A Canada-wide catastrophic drug program would be less costly to administer than several small programs in the private sector. Third, eliminate rebates for pharmaceutical companies and pharmacists and provide funding for research based on the actual needs of the public rather than on profits for pharmaceutical companies.

Finally, breast cancer prevention could be greatly improved. This disease has many risk factors: personal and family history, obesity, and the use of alcohol and tobacco can increase the risk of breast cancer.

I hope that all these good ideas will help the members of the House to understand what a terrible illness breast cancer is. Although this bill has good intentions, it does not do enough. Nevertheless, we hope that the members opposite will propose a better and stronger Canada-wide strategy that will help all women suffering from breast cancer rather than just a few of them.

•(1130)

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in favour of this particular piece of legislation but I would also like to make some further comments with regard to it.

The Liberal Party supports any efforts to increase awareness with regard to illness and research, to provide more information to Canadians, and to deal with screening issues. That is a given. We all agree with that and believe we should be doing this in many other

areas. There are a number of areas within health promotion and disease prevention wherein the federal government could take a lead as well as an active approach to ensure that 60% of preventable diseases are prevented. There are broader issues we should be looking at rather than this one particular issue, but it is a start.

The federal government has signed an agreement on a pan-Canadian approach to breast cancer. If the legislation says that the federal government has a leadership role to play with regard to an issue like breast cancer, then it must also look at a pan-Canadian approach to many other things.

My colleague who spoke last talked about a pharmaceutical strategy. The 2004 health accord said that we need a pharmaceutical strategy because many Canadians do not have access to lifesaving drugs and drugs required to treat chronic disease. Drugs cost a lot of money and many people cannot afford them.

We must discuss how to implement some of the really important issues in the health accord that require federal leadership. The federal government cannot say that on the one hand it wants to lead pan-Canadian approaches regarding one issue, but on the other hand it does not want to do it regarding another issue. That would not be a reasonable or logical response to anything.

There is a huge role for the federal government to play in ensuring that no matter where Canadians live in this country they have access to the health care services they require when they need them and that in many instances they have access to integrated services that would prevent them from getting diseases. That would provide huge savings to the health care system. It would also help deal with disease chronicity which would help keep people out of hospitals and increase savings and cost-effectiveness in the system.

There are many things we must talk about if we want to open the door to a pan-Canadian approach. I am glad to see that the member has brought this forward. I hope his party will listen to him. I also hope that the government will take a pan-Canadian approach toward many necessary issues.

The bill calls for the federal government to work with the provinces and territories to increase awareness among women with regard to dense breast tissue. The issue I want to flag here is that while we want to increase awareness, which is a very positive step, we also want to be careful that we do not create anxiety among women who have dense breast tissue because there is not much evidence to show that the screening detection methods such as MRIs, et cetera, will give the wanted outcome and save lives.

There is one important thing to remember in terms of breast awareness and in terms of preventing breast cancer. It is not the yearly doctor visit for a breast examination that is so important, nor is having an MRI. What is important is that a woman examine her breasts every month at the appropriate time.

Private Members' Business

Many people would ask how that monthly self-examination would help. If a woman examined her breasts monthly she would know what they normally felt like or how they felt the last time she had tests done and she was told her breasts were fine. I am not only talking about breasts. When a woman screens herself on a monthly basis she knows what is normal for her body. Therefore, any change she discovers will be a flag that something new has occurred. It may not be anything she needs to worry about but it will at least cause her to initiate a visit to her physician for investigation.

It is important for women, especially those who have dense breast tissue, to understand that self-examination is one of the most important things they can do for themselves. We can say the same thing with regard to men and testicular cancer, et cetera. Awareness is important.

I would like to see the federal government's role expanded in the bill to suggest that it could and should be a clearing house for best practices.

• (1135)

For instance, British Columbia has a solid record in this country for having the highest survivor rates and lowest death rates with regard to breast cancer. That is not only because of early screening but also because of an integrated approach wherein researchers and individuals dealing with genomics as well as individuals from the cancer society and the cancer agencies work together as an integrated team. It is important to emulate those best practices which give us best results. Therefore, another role for the federal government would be to take on a pan-Canadian approach by looking at some sort of clearinghouse on many issues.

Unlike the California bill, the bill does not create panic. It does not recommend that women should run out and demand MRIs or further screening. That is good because I would stress there is no evidence that this would help. However, what this bill is suggesting is important and necessary is increased awareness and discussion to help women understand what it is they need to do. Identifying gaps in information and improving information for women is and always will be a good thing.

This year 234,000 women in Canada will be diagnosed with breast cancer of which 5,100 will not survive. Those are very staggering figures. Many of these women are at the peak of their lives and may have children. It is important that they be prompted to exercise methods of prevention wherever necessary.

With regard to not causing panic, we must ensure women are aware that having access to an MRI is not an internationally based clinical guideline and that it does not create a sense of entitlement among women who have dense breast tissue that they should automatically be sent for MRIs. If that is not clear in the bill, it could create panic among these women which in turn could cause an inappropriate drain on health care system resources.

However, the bill is a beginning. If the federal government is interested in pan-Canadian approaches, which is a good idea, it is important that more research be performed to provide better information to women who are at risk of breast cancer. The Canadian Institutes of Health Research is there to increase that research. We need to work with conditions more often to determine

what are best practices. It is important that the federal government accept this, follow through on it and use it as a template with regard to how it can deal with many more issues.

I go back to the 2004 accord. My colleague made the important point that parts of that accord have not received the federal leadership nor political will necessary to provide good outcomes in health care and an effective use of the system. We know the medicare system is sustainable but we must ensure there is a pan-Canadian integrated approach to provide transformative change within the system.

The bill is a start. It flags the fact the federal government cannot say that it is a provincial jurisdiction which will create a precedent for it to not only work with provincial governments but also take on political and leadership roles that will benefit all Canadians.

• (1140)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, I thank my colleagues for their excellent debate on this issue this morning.

I rise today to address Bill C-314, an act respecting the awareness of screening among women with dense breast tissue. I thank my colleague, the member for Barrie, for bringing this important bill forward.

As October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, it is time to draw attention to breast cancer and to raise awareness of this important health issue affecting Canadians.

Statistics tell us that breast cancer is the most common form of cancer among Canadian women. One in nine women will be diagnosed with the disease.

Those statistics are more than just numbers. They represent women whose lives are affected by breast cancer. They are wives, mothers, daughters and friends. This year it is estimated that thousands of women across the country will be diagnosed with breast cancer and that approximately 5,000 women will die from the disease.

Thankfully research is providing answers to many questions regarding breast cancer. We are learning more about prevention, risk factors and treatments. Our government's investments into health research through the Canadian Institutes of Health Research support scientific discoveries regarding all types of cancers including breast cancer. We are learning more about the early detection of breast cancer.

The bill focuses on raising awareness regarding breast density and its effects on breast cancer screening. It emphasizes the importance of this issue in an effort to help women and their doctors make well-informed decisions with regard to breast cancer screening.

Why is that important? More than ever before Canadians are taking an active role in their health and require good information to support that role. Canadians need information on what has been proven as well as what is not yet well understood. Only then can they weigh the risks and benefits of the different courses of action.

Private Members' Business

As well, the Internet revolution allows Canadians to find a great deal of information on health topics. It also means Canadians are faced with the difficulty of deciding what is accurate, inaccurate, important or misleading.

Therefore, providing accurate information to Canadians will increase their awareness and help them make well-informed decisions.

There is a great deal of information available on breast cancer and breast cancer screening which addresses the particular issue of breast density and its implications on breast cancer screening.

A mammogram is an X-ray taken of the breast and is used as a screening method for breast cancer. However, for women with dense breast tissue it can be more difficult for this method to detect small changes that could denote cancer.

Canada's breast cancer screening programs are delivered by the provincial and territorial governments under their jurisdiction for health care delivery. These excellent programs operate according to the highest standards. The federal government is helping breast cancer screening programs through investments made in the Canadian breast cancer screening initiative. This initiative measures the performance of breast cancer screening programs across the country. The information is used by those programs to improve the services they provide to Canadian women.

We are also assisting breast cancer screening programs in sharing their best practices. A key feature of these programs is the important information they provide to women on all aspects of breast cancer screening including breast density. That way we can build on the good work that is already under way.

National non-governmental organizations and their volunteers also play integral roles in raising awareness. The bill recognizes the important role of organizations, such as the Canadian Cancer Society and the Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation, as well as numerous other women's health organizations. All of these organizations work to promote cancer prevention, early detection, effective treatments and research. They also provide education and awareness programs and work to improve the quality of life for those living with breast cancer.

The fact that so many Canadian organizations and programs already provide high quality information to women on breast cancer reflects upon the dedication that exists with regard to this enormous health challenge. Researchers, doctors, nurses and provincial and territorial cancer agencies are committed to reducing the rates of breast cancer.

Our government's investment in the Canadian strategy for cancer control and its implementation by the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer is part of this national commitment. As its name implies, the partnership is working across the country to speed up the use of effective approaches to cancer prevention and control so that all Canadians will benefit. It is helping to fill gaps, build new models and expand existing programs where needed. Cancer screening is one of the partnership's priorities and its work to provide information to Canadians is consistent with the intent of the bill. The renewed investment in the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer announced

by our Prime Minister in March will help that excellent work that is under way continue.

• (1145)

We have much to build on and many best practices to apply as we continue to support Canadian women in accessing the information they need to make decisions on their health. Of course, our efforts are in line with the role of the federal government in supporting health research and identifying best practices in creating partnerships and of promoting the health of Canadians.

In closing, Bill C-314 encourages the Government of Canada to use existing initiatives to raise awareness of breast density in the context of breast cancer screening. This is important for Canadian women.

I sincerely hope we have the support of all members in this House for this important bill.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the member for Barrie on his bill. October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, and his bill's noble objectives are most appropriate.

On this side of the House, and I am sure on the other side as well, we recognize the impact that breast cancer has on the people of Quebec and Canada. This disease is unfortunately all too common. The statistics do not lie: one out of every nine women will suffer from breast cancer in her lifetime. What is even more tragic is that one out of every twenty-nine women will die from breast cancer. The considerable progress that has been made in recent years in research, treatment and screening has significantly lowered the breast cancer mortality rate.

Breast cancer is still too common among Canadian women. I should also point out to the House that, although it is less common, breast cancer can also affect men. An estimated 23,000 women will be affected by this type of cancer, not to mention the thousands of loved ones and caregivers who are also affected. The disease also has high social and economic costs. There are other human costs associated with this terrible disease: the loss of income can be devastating. Many couples do not survive these challenges, and loved ones become caregivers but receive little support from this government.

The bill introduced by my colleague opposite addresses a very particular issue: cancer in women with dense breast tissue. This is a real problem. Recent research has shown that dense breast tissue is a factor as important as age in the risk of breast cancer. Higher tissue density also makes breast cancer screening more difficult. During a mammogram, tumours and high-density masses in the breast both show up as white spots. It is much more difficult for women with dense breast tissue to get quick diagnoses with traditional equipment.

Private Members' Business

It is also important to bear in mind that problems linked to dense breast tissue are not likely to diminish; quite the opposite. Studies have shown a link between being overweight or obese and denser breast tissue. I do not need to remind this House that the issue of excess weight has reached epidemic proportions in Canada. We can only assume that an increasing number of women will have dense breast tissue in the near future and that this trend is on the rise.

Once again, I would like to say how much I appreciate that the member for Barrie has brought this issue forward so that we can discuss it today. Awareness is always a positive initiative. It makes women more vigilant and ensures that health care professionals are better informed. Everyone supports awareness—it is a noble objective and a just cause, but it is merely one element of treatment. In my mind, this bill is pointless. It does nothing concrete for women who have or will have breast cancer. It does not ensure better access to a health care system that is so desperately lacking in its current state.

I am a doctor myself. I decided to go into politics to make a difference. Many causes are important to me, such as the recognition of foreign credentials—which affects me personally—the status of women and immigration. But health is at the top of that list. I know that the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert elected me because they believed in the NDP message that we will work for them. I am worried that this bill, while noble and having created the opportunity for debate, will not make a real difference in the lives of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, Quebec and Canada.

• (1150)

One of the issues my constituents talk to me about is access to a family doctor. This bill has nothing to offer people who do not have a family doctor. This bill will not improve access to our health care system. We know that a timely diagnosis helps significantly increase the chances of survival. Without access to a doctor, many Canadians will not have access to this timely diagnosis. Wait times for mammograms are also far too long in many places in Quebec and Canada. Those are two significant factors that are not addressed in this bill that would help improve treatment, survival rates and quality of life for breast cancer survivors.

That is why the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert voted for me. They want their daily lives to be better. They are demanding better access to health care, and rightfully so. Despite the good intentions of the hon. member for Barrie, this bill does nothing for the Canadian general public.

The hon. member for Barrie was right when he said in the preamble of his bill that the provinces are responsible for the delivery of health care. I agree with him, but I would like to remind him that he is wrong to think that his government has no responsibility in this. The federal government currently has a funding agreement with the provincial and territorial governments. Under that agreement, the different governments agreed to certain specific objectives.

This tool could be used to achieve the objectives of developing better breast cancer diagnostics and treatment for women with dense breast tissue. This is an agreement the provincial and territorial governments, including that of Quebec, signed on to. Why does the

member opposite not encourage his government to get on board? We could achieve better concrete results that way.

Perhaps the member for Barrie does not believe that the 2004 health accord is the right tool to allow us to meet these objectives. If that is the case, the 2004 health accord gives his government certain tools to determine whether the accord's objectives have been met, whether the funds transferred are being used in the manner agreed upon by the federal, provincial and territorial governments, and whether the funding is achieving the expected results. It is important for his government to be able to tell Quebecers and Canadians whether the health accord, which will expire in 2014, is delivering the promised results. Such an accountability exercise, one to which Canadians are entitled, would be the first step in determining needs and the model that will be negotiated in good faith and in partnership with the provincial and territorial governments, including the Government of Quebec, of course. I therefore invite the hon. member to exert pressure on his government to report back to Canadians on the results of this accord and to begin discussions in order to ensure funding for our health care system and for the objectives negotiated for the well-being of all Canadians.

I would also call on the members opposite to address the underlying causes of the problem. I mentioned earlier that women who are overweight or obese are more likely to have dense breast tissue. Women who smoke and who have low levels of physical activity are also at higher risk of developing breast cancer. The Canadian Institute for Health Information indicated in a report that socio-economic status and poverty are significant social determinants of obesity. The Canadian Council on Learning has confirmed that smoking and low levels of physical activity are related to poverty and a lower socio-economic status.

I therefore invite the hon. member for Barrie and this government to address the employment problems facing Canadians, to implement measures that will help the people of Canada to live in dignity, and to find ways to help families in our ridings so that they do not have to live paycheque to paycheque in order to be able to buy groceries.

• (1155)

Quebeckers and Canadians do not have better jobs than they did two years ago. In addition, young people are once again more affected by unemployment than the Canadian average. Furthermore, the number of children living in poverty is not decreasing, far from it. This government's lack of action in this regard is negatively affecting the health of young people. Action must be taken immediately.

I would like to close by saying that I support the principles of this bill. In order to help all Quebecers and Canadians, we must find a way to improve access to doctors and reduce wait times for the diagnosis and treatment of various illnesses.

Ms. Marie-Claude Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin by saying that I fully support a plan for breast cancer screening. I salute the member opposite for his initiative.

Private Members' Business

We all know that this disease claims the lives of far too many people and that many deaths could be avoided with early detection. We also know that women with dense breast tissue are four to six times more likely to develop cancer, which requires timely screening. Although we approve a complete breast cancer screening program for women with dense breast tissue, this bill is vague and clearly lacks substance. In addition, it will not have any tangible effects. Health care workers and women concerned need more than just encouragement to raise awareness and promote best practices. Once again, the government is failing to provide leadership. When will there be a funding and implementation plan for a real national strategy to improve breast cancer screening?

It is also important that we not neglect other forms of cancer and diseases that could be prevented with screening that is quick, accurate and, above all, accessible to everyone. Under the 2003 and 2004 health accords, the government made the following commitments: reduce wait times and increase the number of doctors, nurses and health professionals.

With this bill, the government is attempting use a band-aid solution to hide the commitments it did not fulfill. Seriously, are we really going to prevent breast cancer by encouraging women to be tested? What about women who do not have access to a family doctor and those who must wait six months for a second test? Everyone realizes that cancer can grow a lot in six months, and I know what I am talking about.

This bill should include the following measures, otherwise it does not serve any purpose, other than being a waste of paper. There must be adequate funding to create systematic breast cancer screening programs. These programs should be free for all women and men, since men can also get breast cancer. Particular attention should be paid to women aged 40 and up. There must also be standards for existing programs to help the provinces that already have a plan. There must be a plan for the particular issue related to screening for women with dense breast tissue. We must also work with Nunavut to help the territory implement its first screening plan. We absolutely must ensure that the entire Canadian population has access to a family doctor and to specialists within a reasonable period of time. We must also give general practitioners, gynecologists and oncologists the tools they need and the necessary equipment to conduct tests within a reasonable period of time.

I remind members that more than 5 million Canadians do not have access to a family doctor. That is what we should be addressing. We know that the earlier a cancer is detected, the more effective treatment will be. This applies to all forms of cancer. This government often neglects research, development and innovation. A lot of studies are currently underway but are underfunded. I do not think it is hard to understand: if we invest strategically in research, we can solve a number of problems at every level.

We must also make considerable investments in psychological care for people who are diagnosed with cancer and their families. Cancer affects most families in Canada, directly or indirectly. Even if we implement prevention programs, we also need assistance programs for people who are living with cancer.

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in Canada. It is crucial that patients and their families receive support as they fight

this terrible disease. We need to do more than simply create awareness and encourage screening. Organizations that fight against breast cancer agree that this bill does not bring significant improvements to screening measures for the women who are most at risk of developing breast cancer. They know what they are talking about. The Conservatives seem to think that this is another area of health care where the federal government has no role to play.

• (1200)

I will say it again—the government needs to take a lead role in health care issues and it needs to work with the provinces. In fact, what we need are large-scale improvements in existing screening programs. Of course, that includes better funding, as I have said before, along with clear standards and the establishment of screening programs in all regions of the country.

The NDP has long been calling on the government to play a fuller role in primary health care and preventive care. Obviously, breast cancer screening measures should be part of that.

A number of groups share our opinion. And I think that the government should listen to them from way up there in its ivory tower because they are the ones on the ground who know the issue.

Quebec's association of hematologists and oncologists says that while it is important to increase breast cancer screening, we cannot forget about other kinds of tumours. Improvements need to be made in the prevention of and screening for all cancers. We must not concentrate all our efforts on one group of women or one type of cancer.

The MQRP and Canadian Doctors for Medicare are saying that we have to ensure that patients have timely access to general practitioners and specialists in order to undergo the necessary tests to get a timely diagnosis. As I was saying earlier, cancer spreads quickly. Access to the health care system, according to the MQRP, to me and to the NDP, is the key solution in battling breast cancer and significantly increases patients' chances of survival.

Dr. Maté Poljicak, a surgical oncologist and director of an interdisciplinary team of breast cancer specialists at the Centre hospitalier universitaire at the Université de Montréal, says that in some cases, such as those for women with dense breast tissue, mammography is not an effective breast cancer screening method. MRIs and much more advanced imaging screens are needed in those cases.

The Canadian Breast Cancer Network, which is run by cancer survivors, does not believe this bill could improve screening procedures for women at greater risk of developing breast cancer.

This network is calling for—

• (1205)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am sorry to interrupt, but the time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot has three minutes left for the next time.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House resumed from October 20 consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian farmers feed the world and they deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions, whether it is to market individually or through a voluntary pooling entity. We believe that all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them.

This bill aims to give western Canadian farmers the right to choose how to market their wheat, durum and barley independently or through a voluntary pool. The marketing freedom for grain farmers act proposes to end the Canadian Wheat Board's six-decade-old monopoly over sales of wheat, durum and barley in western Canada. It will give wheat and barley growers across western Canada the same rights that canola and pulse growers enjoy along with farmers in other parts of Canada, namely, the right to do what they want with the crop they paid to plant, grow and harvest. By allowing market freedom, grain growers will be able to market based on what is best for their needs and businesses.

I want to talk a bit about what the opportunity means for Manitobans, where wheat and barley are major drivers of the provincial economy, generating almost \$800 million in farm cash receipts and over \$900 million in exports just last year. Monopoly is a model no longer appropriate in a modern growth-oriented commodity sector in Canada. Milton Boyd, a professor and economist at the University of Manitoba, agrees. He has stated:

—all of the major grain marketing boards around the world have already disappeared (or have been privatized) over the last 20 years...mainly because farmers and consumers worldwide have wanted economic reforms, competition, and freedom to choose.

Under marketing freedom, we can look forward to increased innovation and new value-added industries. The removal of the monopoly would allow Manitoba farmers to sell their grains directly to a processor, whether it be a pasta manufacturer, a flour mill or any other of their choosing. Farmer entrepreneurs would have the option of starting up their own small specialty flour mills and pasta plants, without the red tape it currently involves.

There has been tremendous growth in value-added opportunities for oats, pulses and canola across the Prairies over the past 20 years. There is no reason not to expect more opportunities for wheat, durum and barley.

In Manitoba alone the acreage of oats has increased by over 250,000 acres since it was removed from Wheat Board control. This has allowed for the opening and expansion, as an example, of Can-

Oat Milling, a processing mill in Portage la Prairie. Just over the border in North Dakota from where I live, many new pasta plants have sprung up and created jobs that very well could have been created in Manitoba.

Recently we heard great news coming out of we Regina that a pasta plant was turning the sod to take Canadian durum next year. That is how quick it can happen. These are the types of value-added industries and jobs that exist when farmers have the option to market their products as they choose. This, along with increased trade, could create many new jobs and opportunities. We know this is a significant change involving a very complex set of issues.

The bill proposes to give farmers and the industry a transition period of up to five years to allow time to adjust to the significant and positive change to their businesses and business models. To avoid market disruption, the goal is for farmers and grain marketers to start forward contracting for the 2012-13 crop year as soon as it is possible. During the transition period, the interim Canadian Wheat Board will continue to offer farmers the option of pooling their crops with initial prices guaranteed by the Government of Canada. During this time, the interim CWB will develop a business plan for full privatization.

Our government is ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart the way forward because we believe that an open and competitive grain market can and should include a viable voluntary Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1210)

Because innovation is critical to the future of the Canadian grain industry, the proposed bill also provides for a voluntary funding mechanism to support research and market development. We fully recognize that there will be costs associated with this transition and the voluntary Canadian Wheat Board will be a smaller organization than the one existing today. Our government is prepared to assist with the extra ordinary costs associated with winding down this monopoly.

Farmers currently pay the daily costs of operating of the CWB with the overall costs guaranteed by our government. With this change, the government recognizes that farmers should not be left alone to deal with the costs of transition to a voluntary mandate and therefore our government is ready to assist, while making responsible use of taxpayer dollars.

Government Orders

Another important facet of the bill deals with the Port of Churchill, which in the past has relied heavily on Canadian Wheat Board shipments. Our government recognizes, and has demonstrated, our support and commitment to the north. We understand the importance of the Port of Churchill as a valuable asset and we are working with stakeholders across the agricultural industry, as well as other industries, to explore development opportunities for the port and we are looking at a number of initiatives to continue to diversify the economy of Churchill.

Jim Carr, the president and CEO of the Business Council of Manitoba said, "We see Churchill as more than a port that takes Wheat Board grain. We see Churchill as the Arctic Gateway". The managing director of OmniTRAX, Mike Ogborn, said that his organization "sees a strong future for the port and the railway". Our government agrees with these comments. The Port of Churchill will remain the Prairies' Arctic gateway to the world.

With regard to the concerns around short lines, which have been raised by many members of the opposition, the Government of Canada, not the CWB, protects the right of producers to use short line railways and inland terminals and we will continue to ensure these producers have that access.

Grain growers in Manitoba are like any other business people. They want to make the right decisions at the right time for their farms and their families. They already decide what to plant and when to harvest. They make marketing decisions on their canola and pulse crops, their peas, lentils, beans, oats and many other crops. They just want the same marketing freedom for their wheat, durum and barley.

Spencer Fernando of *The Manitoban* said:

The end of the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly restores the rights of western farmers, and shows we respect the freedom of individuals to control their own labour and the products of that labour. It is the right thing to do, not just economically, but also because it lives up to the principles upon which Canada is based.

My government trusts farmers to make their marketing choices, based on what is best for their businesses, families and communities. We want to put farmers back in the driver's seat so they can continue to drive this economy. We believe that an open and competitive grain market can include a viable voluntary pooling entity and we are ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart that future.

We owe it to farmers, customers and shippers to provide market certainty so they can plan their businesses for the following year. With this change, our entrepreneurial farmers can expand markets, increase their incomes and attract greater investment now. So why make them wait? Marketing freedom has been a cornerstone of our platform since day one and it was part of our throne speech last spring. I am proud that we are delivering on our long-standing promise to the western grain farmers. As the Prime Minister has said, what we are seeing here is a new horizon, a new field of opportunity, not just for western grain farmers but for workers and businesses in western Canada generally.

An open grain market will attract new investment, encourage innovation and create new jobs for Canadians. I support that.

• (1215)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to what degree does the member believe that the grain farmers in the Prairies should be able to influence the decision of the government

about the Wheat Board? I ask the member to reflect on the plebiscite that was conducted, in which 62% of the prairie wheat farmers suggested we needed to retain the Canadian Wheat Board. To what degree does he feel the government is obligated to listen to those farmers?

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, I respect the hon. member for his comments and concerns, but in my mind this is purely about farmers' right to grow and market their own product. I have lived in an agricultural community my entire life and I have seen producers spend hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of dollars to prepare the soil, to plant the seed, to fertilize it, to treat it, to care for it, to swath it and then to harvest it, only at the end of the day to be told that they cannot market that product themselves. As rights across all of Canada, it is a right of farmers to sell what they produce.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know a number of farmers visited the member for Brandon—Souris at his riding on Friday and protested the fact that they were being denied their right to vote on this issue. My question is more along the lines of the code of conduct and the conflict of interest code by which all MPs are duty bound.

What is his view of MPs who make their living as prairie grain producers voting on a bill that their own party says will provide more money for those farmers? In that context I would remind him that when we voted on the bailout for the auto industry, some Tory MPs who were car dealers recused themselves from the vote because it would have a direct impact on the industry through which they make their living.

Does he believe those Tory MPs who are grain farmers subject to the monopoly desk of the Canadian Wheat Board should recuse themselves from the vote tonight and all subsequent votes on bill C-18?

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, if I have listened to my hon. friend correctly over the last several days, the suggestion from the opposition is that with the loss of the Wheat Board, all Canadian farmers' revenues will go down, so in reality, members on this side who are active in the agricultural industry would be voting for less income for themselves.

We are sent here to understand the issues. We know that western Canadian voters have supported our government's position on this issue since 2004. The fact that we made a commitment to the voters and are following through on that commitment earns us a great deal of respect in the community in the sense that we are actually doing what we said we would do.

Government Orders

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am following this debate closely. I represent a riding in Ontario, so it is not directly affected.

I appreciate the views and speeches by members of Parliament who represent western farmers. I think there is some confusion. The opposition parties are saying that the bill kills the Canadian Wheat Board. I thought the bill was about providing choice and options as to whether or not farmers would like to continue to participate in a wheat board or whether they would like to market their grain on their own.

Could the member explain whether or not the bill actually kills the Wheat Board, or whether it simply provides choice for farmers?

• (1220)

Mr. Merv Tweed: Mr. Speaker, that is the crux of the whole bill; to give marketing opportunity and freedom to people who have not been able to choose for several years. I will use the opposition's concerns. Who would not want to become the CEO of a company that has 62% of the market share the day they open the door? Who would not want to have access to all the marketing people that it deals with around the world? Who would not want all that information?

I fear that the opposition, by scaring people into making decisions, is going the wrong way. It is about freedom. It is about freedom to do as farmers please with the fruits of their labour and energy. I do not see how that freedom could be debated by anyone.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for over 60 years the Canadian Wheat Board has provided an essential service to farmers throughout the Prairies. Today is indeed a sad day, as we see the government has made the decision to limit debate in an attempt to force the bill to the next level. We need to be very clear in terms of just how beneficial the Canadian Wheat Board has been to the prairie farmer over those years.

It is in essence farmers working with farmers in order to maximize a reasonable return so that they can earn a respectable living on prairie farms. Over the years the Canadian Wheat Board has established itself at the top in the whole area of branding, particularly in wheat, and I will focus strictly on wheat for now.

Throughout the world we are recognized as the best producers of wheat. In good part it is because of the prairie farmer and because of the fine work that the Wheat Board has done over the years. It is because of that history and that branding that we are able to get the maximum return for our farmers. Farmers are able to derive many benefits through the Canadian Wheat Board.

I would suggest that the action we are taking today is to the detriment of the Canadian Prairie farmer. I appeal to government members to give a second thought and heed the advice in what people are saying, not only inside this chamber but as prairie farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta.

I will quote *The Economist*, which is a world-renowned news organization. It states:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies. Eventually, this should lead to consolidation and fewer, bigger farms—making Canada a more competitive

wheat producer, but devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

Let there be no doubt that this bill is going to destroy Canadian wheat farmers. There are a number of wheat farmers who will be destroyed by the passage of the bill. Let there be no doubt that the bill would be to the detriment of many rural prairie communities. We need to realize that.

Farmers have spoken on the issue. Even though there was a legal obligation on the government, through the Canadian Wheat Board, to have a plebiscite in accordance with section 47.1, the government failed to meet that obligation. However, the Wheat Board went ahead and had an independent plebiscite on the issue. In the plebiscite 62% of our wheat producers clearly indicated that they wanted to retain the Wheat Board.

We know why the prairie farmers wanted to retain the Wheat Board. It is something they are far more familiar with than 90% of the members inside this chamber. They saw the value of the Canadian Wheat Board and they believe it is extremely important to the long-term survival of prairie farmers and their local rural communities. They saw the value in terms of producing that quality wheat and in having the brand of the Canadian Wheat Board. They understand the issue. They do not need to be lectured by the Prime Minister as to why it has to go.

I posed the question to the Prime Minister: why does he have a personal hatred towards the Canadian Wheat Board?

That is what this is all about. It is because the current Prime Minister cannot stand the Wheat Board, and that is well documented. He is not listening to the facts. He is not looking for any sort of research or documentation that proves that the demise of the Wheat Board is good for the prairie provinces. He has not tabled anything to that effect. The Prime Minister is treating our prairie farmers like trash.

• (1225)

What does the Prime Minister say specifically? On October 7, 2011, *The Globe and Mail* stated:

Prime Minister Stephen Harper has a message for all the critics of his government's plan to end the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board: Get over it.

"It's time for the wheat board and others who have been standing in the way to realize that this train is barrelling down a prairie track," the Prime Minister said.

He continued:

"You're much better to get on it than to lie on the tracks because this is going ahead".

I have fairly thick skin and I can take the hurdles that have been tossed over from the other side, even if it is coming from the Prime Minister, but he needs to know full well that we are talking about tens of thousands of prairie grain farmers who disagree. These are the tens of thousands of prairie farmers he is telling to get on board or lie on the track.

Government Orders

I have never seen such disrespect for westerners as I have seen from this particular Prime Minister. If he really wanted to listen to what people out west are saying, why does he not instruct our committee here in the House of Commons to go out west and listen first-hand to what the prairie farmers are saying, not the members of Parliament here in Ottawa? Let us take the debate to the Prairies.

The Premier of Manitoba has launched a lawsuit, I understand. There is phenomenal opposition to this legislation in the Prairies. Where is the intestinal fortitude? Where is a Prime Minister who wants to show leadership, take it to the Prairies and listen to what the farmers have to say?

Why not allow the Premier of Manitoba, the average farmer and others to go before the Manitoba legislature? I am sure we have some pretty good connections. We could arrange for committee rooms inside the Manitoba legislature to be made available for parliamentarians from Ottawa to listen to presentation after presentation of those individuals who want to send a message to the federal government. The recording, translation and all those facilities are in place there, and I can assure the Prime Minister that space would be made available in the Manitoba legislature. I am confident of that.

I would welcome the opportunity to open that committee by having the Premier of the Province of Manitoba indicate what he believes and why it is he believes the Canadian Wheat Board should remain.

I believe it is equally important that we hear from the prairie farmers, the individuals on whom this legislation would have such a profound impact. I would like to hear some of the rural municipalities come before a committee in the Manitoba legislature to provide their input.

What does the government have to lose if it is so convinced? The only argument the Conservatives put forth is freedom. They have no other argument. They argue that more flour mills will open up. They do not have any record or proof of that. They have no real tangible proof that will take place. In the last decade, how many pasta plants and flour mills did we see open in North Dakota, compared to the west? I suggest there have been more in the west.

I do not buy the argument of the Conservatives. I believe it is because the Prime Minister of Canada has a hatred for the Canadian Wheat Board. Now that he has his majority, he is prepared to do whatever it takes and even break laws that are currently in place. He is prepared to break laws to bring in this legislation. He will do whatever it takes.

I appeal to the Prime Minister to at least have the courage to bring it out and allow prairie farmers and others on the Prairies to contribute to this very critical debate on the future of the Prairies in Canada.

• (1230)

Mr. Dave MacKenzie (Oxford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my friend across the aisle rail on and on and make many assumptive opinions, purely of his own, that have no basis in fact.

However, there are some real facts. I would like him to list all the ridings held by Liberal members west of the New Brunswick-Quebec border.

There may be some real truth to that message. If he takes it to heart, he will understand which party represents most of Canada, and certainly the west.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to respond to that question.

I would ask the member to look back to the late 1980s, to the F-18 crisis. There was an arrogant government, known as the Mulroney government, that made the decision to hurt the province of Manitoba in a very political way. Canadians in Manitoba recall that, and that is one of the reasons why, in 1993, Liberals won 12 of the 14 seats. Seats should never be taken for granted.

I would suggest that doing this to farmers, even though farmers do not support it, will have a residual effect. It is going to stick around. Farmers will not forget.

The Liberals might only have two seats in the Prairies and the NDP may only have three seats in the Prairies, but it just means that we have great potential for growth. That member is feeding that growth.

Personally, I would just as soon say to keep the Wheat Board and go from there.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to get up and ask my colleague from Winnipeg North a question.

First, I would like to make a very short statement. On the weekend I was in a riding in the heartland of rural Canada, in a place called Burdett. There was a fundraiser there.

I talked to numerous farmers, and every one of them said, "Tell me, when are we going to make the change to the Wheat Board, so that we can sell our own grains, our own wheat, and our own barley?" That is not my question.

My question for the member for Winnipeg North is, would the member agree that farmers who seed the grain, harvest the grain, own the grain and sell the grain on the open market should be sent to jail, like one farmer in my riding who sold his own grain?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I was in the heart of Canada, in the beautiful city of Winnipeg. We are all very familiar with Winnipeg.

Over the weekend, I, too, met with some farmers.

Some hon. member: Name them.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Keith Ryan is one. I met with Keith on Saturday, and I believe he might even be one of the individuals who is looking at some sort of a lawsuit in trying to deal with the Wheat Board.

The reality is that when I was meeting with farmers in Winnipeg, they made it very clear to me that I had to come back here and fight to save the Wheat Board, because it is the farmers who want the Wheat Board.

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To the member who just stood up and asked the question, I would suggest he come out to the prairie provinces. Winnipeg is a good place. I will be more than happy to arrange a meeting. That is the reason we need to have the agriculture committee come out west. There are some great people in western Canada. Let us hear what the west has to say about the government's agenda for the Wheat Board.

• (1235)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with almost half of the arable land in Canada, an estimated 44,329 farms, agriculture is an essential industry and economic driver in my province. With 14 ridings, all representing a significant rural component, 13 out of 14 re-elected members are on this side of the House. The farmers in my province have spoken.

As a member of Parliament from Saskatchewan, I am honoured to represent western farmers and very pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the subject of ending the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly and giving prairie wheat and barley growers the freedom to choose how they market their product.

The naysayers and doom and gloomers tell us that change is bad, that our western Canadian farmers are not capable of marketing their own grain. Are they somehow different from the farmers in other parts of Canada who apparently know how to market their own product, including wheat and barley? Farmers take all the risks: what to plant, when to harvest, and how and when to market what they produce. That is, unless they grow barley or wheat in western Canada.

It seems to me that change has been a constant over the years and industries have grown and prospered as a result. Let us look at how change has already transformed the Canadian Wheat Board over its 76 year history.

The CWB was established in 1935 as a voluntary marketing agency for prairie wheat. That was the original vision. In 1943 sales of wheat through the board became compulsory. Six years later, the Canadian Wheat Board powers were extended to include prairie oats and barley. Therefore, from 1949 to 1974, 25 years, the board was the single desk for western oats, barley and wheat, whether for human consumption or animal feed. The changes up to that point resulted in a single desk monopoly.

Then change moved things in a new direction. With changes to the feed grain policy in 1974 and again in 1976, exclusive marketing rights over prairie grain fed to animals in Canada were removed from the board. Did the animal feed producers fall apart and stumble into bankruptcy? They did not. In fact, the use of cereal grains for livestock has grown significantly since then.

Flash forward to 1989 when oats were removed from board jurisdiction. Did oat producers flounder? Absolutely not. Two new plants were announced within weeks of the decision and a thriving oats processing sector has since developed in western Canada. Farmers quickly adapted to the changes and the CWB was not missed.

Historically, what started out as a monopoly has been evolving over the last 35 years until what we are left with is a single desk for barley and wheat for export and human consumption. What was

considered necessary during World War II is no longer what the savvy, smart farmers of the 21st century need.

Sylvain Charlebois, associate dean and professor of food distribution and policies at the University of Guelph, said:

At the end of the day, single-desk marketing should cease. Such a reform will make Canada more competitive, as the monopoly is a hindrance to our ability to compete globally.

Barley growers recognize that and so does the government.

The Canadian malting and brewing industry has lost confidence in the ability of the Canadian Wheat Board to reliably supply the malt and barley it needs to be competitive in international markets. Imagine what it is like to be locked into using one supplier and not have the confidence that the malt and barley will be there when the production line needs it.

It is time that western barley growers and wheat producers had some options. They take all the risks, they should be able to decide how and to whom to sell their grains. They know that commodity and food prices are rising to record levels, driven by growing demand for the high quality innovative food produced by Canadian farmers and food processors. This turnabout has boosted the bottom lines of our producers. Stronger farm incomes and higher prices are forecast well into the next decade.

• (1240)

The outlook for Canadian agriculture is bright and there is a new-found optimism in the farming industry in this country. According to a survey by Farm Credit Canada, three-quarters of farmers believe that their farm businesses will be better off in five years.

Knowing that farming has become increasingly modernized and competitive on the world stage, they are looking for new ways of doing business, new technologies and new marketing strategies. Succeeding in the 21st century involves looking at the Wheat Board through a different lens, a single desk is no longer needed.

The Minister of Agriculture asked department officials to meet with industry and stakeholders, including the Canadian Wheat Board, throughout the summer, in order to assist in developing a transitional plan for opening the market.

Our government has always said that it is open to seeing the continuation of the Canadian Wheat Board as a voluntary marketing option for producers. There will be producers who will continue to use the Canadian Wheat Board after the monopoly ends, and that is their choice. There will also be producers who prefer market freedom and they should have that choice.

Spencer Fernando of *The Manitoban* said:

Nobody is hurt by allowing farmers to freely market the products they worked to produce. Limiting the freedom of western farmers goes against one of the principles we believe in as Canadians.

Government Orders

Western Canadian wheat and barley farmers want the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world. That is what our government has pledged to provide. That is what we promised when we were elected with a majority and it is what we stated in the recent throne speech. This promise will be kept.

This legislation, when passed, will give western Canadian wheat and barley farmers the freedom to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them.

Change has always been a part of the Canadian Wheat Board's history and I expect it will continue to be.

Giving western Canadian farmers marketing freedom has been a long-standing promise of our government. Since I was first elected in 2008, I have been reminded of this promise over and over again. I am committed, along with our government, to work in the best interests of farmers and to give them the marketing freedom they deserve. By passing the bill, we will be keeping our promise.

I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and the parliamentary secretary for their dedication and hard work in bringing the bill forward and ensuring its swift passage. I encourage all opposition members to support the bill.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about the government keeping its promise. It has made many promises. I recall that before the election the Conservatives promised that they would put this issue to farmers for a vote.

The Conservatives keep talking about the vast majority of Canadians having voted for them, but if I recall the number the Conservatives took office by was just 39%. That means that 61% of Canadians did not want the Conservatives in office but our system put them there.

Now the member is talking about the many promises that her government made. In order for the Conservatives to keep their promise the right thing to do would be to bring the issue to farmers and let them make the decision by voting on it instead of the Conservative Party shoving it down their throats.

Would it not be better to bring the issue to farmers and let them decide on their future? The Conservative Party made that promise before the election. The Conservatives said the issue would be brought to farmers and they would vote on it. The government should stick to what the majority of farmers decide.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, to be clear, 13 out of 14 re-elected members on this side of the House are from Saskatchewan. Of the 14 ridings, 13 are held by members on this side of the House. We represent farmers in Saskatchewan. Every riding has a rural component to it. We have listened to farmers. We promised that we would remove the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly and we are holding true to that promise.

• (1245)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member talk about western farmers wanting to make the changes. At the same time, we know that earlier this summer there was a survey. I do not know how valid the numbers are but they seem to be pretty solid. I think they were based

on a participation rate of about 56%. In the case of wheat, as I understand it, 62% of those who responded said that they would like to keep the single desk Canadian Wheat Board as is.

For those 62%, on the assumption that is correct, what would my colleague say to those 62%, assuming that they gave their heartfelt opinion about wanting to keep the single desk?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, no expensive survey can trump the individual right of farmers to market their own grain.

Our government has been very clear that the economy is our top priority. An open grain market would attract investment. It would encourage innovation and create value-added jobs, like the recently announced pasta plant in Saskatchewan. An open grain market would also build a strong economy for all Canadians.

Western Canadian wheat and barley producers deserve the same opportunities that farmers in the rest of Canada have access to. Our government is committed to giving them the opportunities that they want, that they have asked for and that they deserve.

I urge the member to support the bill.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-18, on the Canadian Wheat Board. This bill proposes to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board and to eliminate the single desk marketing system for barley and wheat in Canada. The bill creates an interim board with voluntary pooling to be fully privatized or dissolved if it is not privatized within five years of the legislation coming into force. No elected directors may sit on the governing board of the interim board.

The government claims that this bill benefits farmers by giving them the market and giving them a choice, but they have no choice when it comes to dismantling the board. On September 12, a majority of farmers voted in favour of maintaining the Wheat Board. The government should drop Bill C-18. The single desk marketing system for wheat, durum and barley is an institution that has been very successful and is an essential component of the Prairie economy.

The bill is dangerous. It will ruin Prairie farmers in these difficult economic times. Although the government's decision to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board has serious implications for farmers, it was made without any analysis of its repercussions and it goes against the wishes of farmers.

Taxpayers do not fund the Wheat Board and the Conservatives do not have a mandate to go against the wishes of Prairie farmers.

The Conservatives are acting in the interests of the big American grain companies by interfering in this matter, in order to lower prices and undermine market security for our own farmers.

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Let us look at this from a different angle. The Conservatives say that they represent the majority in the West, on the Prairies. That is why they have made this decision. We must not forget that before the election—I would like to see the Conservatives rise and say this is not true—they promised that, if they were elected, there would be a vote on dismantling the Wheat Board. What has happened to that promise? Do they think that they do not have to keep that promise and not go back to face the farmers just because they were elected?

This is how I see things: there are some farmers who want to dismantle the board and who say they do not need it, and there are some farmers who want the board dismantled. However, taking a broader view, we can ask what the Canadian Wheat Board has done over the past 75 years. It has set prices and stabilized production. Looking at my region, we can compare farmers to our fishers.

•(1250)

[English]

I hope what happened to the fishermen on the east coast does not happen to the farmers in the west. Fishermen work hard to keep their boats. It costs a lot of money. They have to pay their fishermen and deckhands, but they have no control over prices. The market dictates the price.

As my colleague from Saint John knows, people who were fishing codfish were getting 50¢ a pound. Even last year, they were getting 50¢ a pound and people were paying \$4.50 a pound in the stores. As individuals, they have no control on the price. It will be big business that will run it.

I want to use the fishermen as an example for the people of Prairies so the Conservatives do not fall asleep on this and shove it down their throats because they do not want have a vote. They do not want to give them the democracy that any group should have and be able to vote on it. Lobster fishermen were getting \$2 a pound for lobster. People go to restaurants and pay \$10.50 for the lobster on their plates. The fishermen are losing their shirts. They do not even have money to fix the engine on their boat when it breaks down.

What will happen to the farmers who are on their own and need to do the marketing themselves. They are lucky right now to have an organization to do it for them, to give it to them on a silver platter. If the government wants to do something for the farmers, it should do what is right. When it says that it received a big majority to make the decision, this is beautiful.

Only 39% of Conservatives got elected. That is not a big majority. However, when a survey was done, 62% of the farmers did not want it. It was 62% who wanted to keep the board and did not want the government to make the change. The government talks about being close to its people. If it is close to its people, why does it not keep its promise to the people? It had promised, just before the election, that there would be a vote on it. Why not allow the farmers to make that decision? What is wrong with that? What is the government afraid of? Why is it afraid of democracy if it believes in democracy? If it really believes in democracy, what is wrong with allowing all the farmers on the Prairies to vote on it and make a decision?

This has been working for the last 75 years.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Not now.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Yes, some are not happy. Some think they will do better and some will do better, but, collectively, it is a big mistake for our country because we are bending on our knees to the Americans. That is what is happening. We are on our knees to the Americans because they want to get rid of it. How many times have the Americans asked us to get rid of the Wheat Board?

Mr. Pat Martin: Thirteen.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thirteen times. Does that make sense? For that reason alone, we should say that we want sovereignty in our country. The member for Winnipeg Centre just said that the Americans asked us 13 times to abandon the Wheat Board. Is that not reason enough for keeping it?

Why are the Conservatives worried about a vote. Are they worried about losing?

•(1255)

[Translation]

Are they afraid of losing the vote? All they have been doing since May is trying to destroy our Canadian institutions, whether it be the unions, the Canadian Wheat Board or others. They want to destroy our country. They are handing us over to the Americans—free—by adopting the American system. It is shameful to see how the Conservative government is acting. No democracy. No democracy! The Conservatives should be ashamed of themselves. If they are not ashamed and, above all, if they are not afraid, then they should hold a referendum. They should consult the farmers.

I spoke earlier about the lobster fishermen and groundfishermen who earn 50¢ a pound while others earn \$10 a pound. They will regret it when that happens. They will have destroyed a system that worked. Collectively, people in western Canada have been successful. The Conservatives are saying that they could have done better. Perhaps there are some who might have, but others would lose their businesses. Rather than having a board that sets prices for them, individual producers will have to set their own prices. Producers will have to hire more staff to market their products for them.

I have no regrets about voting against this bill. I do not believe that the Conservative government has the right to hold a vote here in the House without consulting producers and farmers and giving them the choice of whether or not to abolish the Wheat Board. The two sides agree on this issue. The Conservatives must give the farmers the chance to vote. That is what people from the Prairies are asking. If the Conservatives have any respect at all for farmers, they must let farmers make the decision by secret ballot. That is what the Conservatives should do.

[English]

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague's comments raise a couple of questions. First, does he know what percentage of farmers voted to impose the Wheat Board on western Canadian farmers back in the early days? If he does not know, I will tell him. It was 0% because there was no vote by farmers then. It was imposed upon them by the government.

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If the member, who is from part of the country that is not affected by the impositions of the Canadian Wheat Board, feels so strongly about it, would he be prepared to take that message across the rest of Canada and impose the Canadian Wheat Board regulations on his farmers? Or, is it just for western Canadian farmers, of whom he has no representation nor the ability to speak on their behalf, yet he wants to impose that upon us?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, first, when I was elected I was elected as a member of Parliament at the federal level and I can go anywhere in the country because I am a Canadian. Do the Conservatives want to take that away from me?

Second, when it was imposed, it was under a Conservative government, the same way it is going to be imposed under a Conservative government to take it away.

Why not give farmers the choice to vote on it? Before the 2011 election, the Conservatives promised them that they could vote on this. Why do the Conservatives not give them the right to vote on it? It is not for me as a member of Parliament to go there and shove it down their throats. They must be given the right to vote on it. That is what the Conservatives should do if they are not ashamed of themselves.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Acadie—Bathurst for his spirited defence of the right of producers to vote on how they choose to market their products.

I know that my colleague from Newfoundland has been telling us recently how, at the very moment in time, when the Conservatives are dismantling the most successful grain marketing company in the world, wholly owned and operated by prairie farmers on a non-profit basis, the fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Atlantic region are contemplating creating a marketing board along the same lines as our freshwater fish marketing board, our dairy marketing boards, our egg marketing board and our turkey and chicken marketing boards. They know that supply management is an advantage and a benefit to producers. The fishermen of Atlantic Canada are coming to that realization.

How is it that Atlantic Canadian fisher people know when their best interests are served, when the Conservatives are blindly abolishing the very same system in the prairie region?

• (1300)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, even the people in Australia are regretting that they got rid of their board. They know they made a mistake now and regret what they have done.

When we look at the fishermen, it is very simple to explain. When lobster fishermen have a hard time getting \$2 a pound and restaurants charge \$10.50 a pound, between the consumer and the fishermen there are a lot of people in between taking their money. That does not happen with a board. Farmers would need to get their own price. The Atlantic fishermen are saying the same thing. Between the customer and the fishermen, there are a lot of people taking the money, and that is why they are getting 50¢ a pound and the stores are getting \$4.50 a pound. That is what would happen if they were to market individually.

Farmers should think twice about what they are getting into. There are some who will make money but the majority will not be making the money. The reason for this board 75 years ago was to look after farmers' interests.

This is a big mistake. The mistake is not by the farmers, but by the Conservative government not letting them vote on it democratically. If the Conservatives believe in democracy they should give farmers the chance to make that decision because it is important for the farmers on the Prairies.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this proposed legislation, which would be a major step forward for Canadian grain producers.

Our Conservative government knows that a prosperous farm means a prosperous economy. As others have said, this bill would give farmers in western Canada the same rights that farmers have in my home riding of Simcoe—Grey here in Ontario. They would share the same right to market their grain to a buyer of their choice and to do what is best for their businesses.

There is always a fear of the unknown, but in this case we do know that others who have gone down a very similar path of marketing freedom have had very positive results. I would like to speak to the wheat industry in Ontario as an example of the kinds of opportunities farmers can capture through a voluntary pool.

Ontario wheat producers moved to a voluntary marketing system eight years ago. Some Ontario wheat producers chose to market their crops through the voluntary pool run by Grain Farmers of Ontario. Others chose from a variety of other marketing methods that are right for their businesses. Since moving to marketing freedom, the Ontario wheat industry has been growing steadily over the past decade, topping a million acres last year and bringing more than \$300 million to the farm gate. It has become one of the province's largest crop exporters. Last year half of the two million tonne crop was exported, driving over \$280 million in sales.

Marketing freedom did not cause the sky to fall in Ontario, as the monopoly supporters would lead us to believe. Contrary to these baseless arguments, Ontario has a dynamic and growing grain industry, the largest this side of the Prairies. In fact, Dr. Terry Daynard, one of the founders of Ontario Corn Producers' Association, said:

...I am glad the Ontario Wheat Board ended single-desk selling years ago, allowing growers like me to market wheat independently.

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The Ontario wheat industry shows what can be done when the entire value chain works together to grow market potential. Today, a strong and innovative value-added sector purchases about half the Ontario wheat crop to manufacture high-quality food products for Canadian grocery stores all over the country. Since moving to an open market, Ontario wheat growers have developed a number of exciting value-added opportunities over the past several years.

Several years ago, the former Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board, today Grain Farmers of Ontario, launched a wheat initiative fund to directly address opportunities to collaborate with all sector partners around value-added uses of Ontario wheat. This program has been so successful that Grain Farmers of Ontario is now looking for similar opportunities in corn and soy.

As an example, Grain Farmers of Ontario is supplying Ontario's wheat to an Ontario-based company that has become Canada's largest pita bread manufacturer. In my riding of Simcoe—Grey, where agriculture and farming are of incredible importance to many families, it is the hard work of local farmers like Ken Ferguson, who is my local mayor, Fred and Brian Dunlop, and Roger and Bill MacLeod who demonstrate that hard-working commitment is representative of all Canadian wheat farmers.

Under marketing freedom, GFO is still the recognized leader in export market development and there is no reason that a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board could not remain a recognized leader as well.

Of course, a major change like this would have a transition period. Farmers in western Canada recognize this. According to Jody Klassen of Mayerthorpe, Alberta, "There's always opportunity. There's a transition period, but the opportunities are there".

Everyone agrees that the Ontario industry is seeing increasing levels of collaboration between the GFO and its private trade partners when it comes to issues like export logistics, contracting, trade missions and promotion. With growing world demand and a high-quality product, Ontario farmers are well positioned to capture new opportunities for the years ahead. Our Conservative government thinks wheat and barley farmers in western Canada have a right to these types of opportunities as well.

Wheat and barley growers in western Canada are like any other business people. They want to make the right decisions for their farms. They already decide what to plant and when to harvest. They make marketing decisions on their canola and pulse crops, their peas, lentils, beans, oats and other crops. They want the same marketing freedom for their wheat and barley.

• (1305)

This bill is fundamentally about innovation, freeing our farmers to innovate and grow their businesses. Our government understands that innovation is key to competitiveness. That is why we have invested up to \$4 million to help develop new grain and oilseed varieties that are tailored to meet the needs of the marketplace and increase profitability of Canadian farmers.

This research has already resulted in 10 new varieties of soybeans targeted at high-value food markets all across the country. There are others in the pipeline, including new varieties of winter wheat, corn, spring wheat, oat and barley that are higher yielding and more resistant to drought and disease.

The shift in market freedom in Ontario has been good for Ontario grain farmers. In fact, according to Harry Buurma, a farmer from Watford:

In the last 10 years the wheat acreage in Ontario has increased by nearly 50 percent, as further support that the change has been a good thing.

Likewise, we believe that the advent of market freedom will breathe new life into the western Canadian wheat industry as well and open up exciting new opportunities for western grain growers. The removal of the monopoly will allow western Canadian farmers to sell their wheat and barley directly to a processor, including new pasta manufacturers, flour mills and other types of processing plants.

There has been tremendous growth in value-added opportunities in Ontario wheat over the past decade. We have every reason to believe that our western wheat and barley growers have what it takes to succeed in exactly the same way.

The Government of Canada trusts farmers to make their marketing choices based on what is best for their own business. We want to put farmers back in the driver's seat so they can continue to drive the economy. We believe that an open and competitive grain market can include a viable voluntary pooling entity.

We are ready to work with the Canadian Wheat Board to chart the way forward. Marketing freedom has been a cornerstone of our platform since day one. It was part of the throne speech last spring.

I am proud that we delivered on our long-standing promise to western Canadian wheat and barley farmers. Our Conservative government makes commitments and we stick to them.

As the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food recently said, "Today we are turning a new page in our nation's history, and Canada and our sector will be better for it." Exciting new opportunities lie ahead for farmers in western Canada. This important step forward will help ensure that all farmers can position their businesses to capture these opportunities.

The opportunities that exist in this great country are enormous. In the 1800s my family came to this great country. They took the rail to Portage la Prairie, walked another 150 kilometres, set down their roots in Alexander, Manitoba, bought 1,500 acres of farm land and started farming wheat and barley. It was composed of three Leitch farms. My family's farming history is rich there.

That is why I am so passionate about this legislation. It finally provides the market opportunity that my late grandfather and his colleagues all desired.

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Canadian farmers feed Canadian families around the world. They deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions. Western Canadian grain farmers, like my late grandfather, deserve the same opportunities and freedoms that the farmers in my riding of Simcoe—Grey in Ontario enjoy. They should be able to choose to whom they sell their grain and when they do it.

I encourage members to support this bill and give it timely passage in the House so that farmers will have the certainty they need to plan their businesses in the coming year. Our government is committed to delivering on our long-standing promise to give western Canadian farmers the marketing freedom they deserve, and we intend to make that happen.

•(1310)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague about two points she made in her speech.

First is the idea of certainty. In times of such economic uncertainty around the world, and Canada is not spared from the economic malaise that is going on, we have to wonder why the Conservative government would choose now to turn the prairie rural economy upside down and on its head with no guarantee that it will be stable or secure, or any better for prairie farmers come next spring should it succeed in abolishing the Wheat Board.

There is a more pointed question I would like to ask the member. She said that the whole point here is to give prairie farmers more choice in how they market their grain. Why then would the government not let prairie farmers choose by having a democratic vote which is guaranteed to them by legislation?

When the Ontario grain farmers did away with their single desk, it was by virtue of a democratic vote. The majority chose to have a dual marketing system. Why would the government not allow the prairie farmers the same choice on how to market their grain by a democratic vote?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I think the farmers in western Canada had their vote. It was on May 2. They chose to have a majority Conservative government represent them in this House and to make sure that it brought forward this legislation that was so important to them.

Farmers in my riding know that they control their destiny. They make the decisions about their farms and in which direction their businesses will go. We want to make sure that western Canadian farmers are given that opportunity.

With respect to the Wheat Board itself, it is not being eliminated. It will be moved to a voluntary entity so that people can participate in it if they so choose.

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member talked about market freedom and the access the Conservatives are trying to accomplish here. She noted the markets in her riding around southern Ontario.

I know that in southern Ontario if a person were to catch a certain amount of fish, he or she could put it out to any market he or she wished. However, there is an entity in Manitoba called the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation, and it is a single desk. Assuming that the member truly believes in the free market, does

that mean the Freshwater Fish Marketing Corporation will also be relieved of its single desk incentive?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, let us not lose focus on what we are talking about here. We are talking about marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. We received a strong mandate on May 2 to make sure that this legislation moves forward so that the western Canadian farmers like my late grandfather have an opportunity to market their businesses under the circumstances they wish to do so.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the representative of the government's position should reflect on what was provided in that particular exchange. The government has been insisting that principles of fair and free market access by individual producers should be allowed, and I think the glaring inconsistency of the argument has now been exposed. A very precise and very real example was provided where there is a single market seller for freshwater fish species for producers in western Canada and the Arctic.

Why is that principle not the word of the day in that argument, but principle seems to be the word of the day in this particular argument? What happened on May 2 for freshwater fish producers?

•(1315)

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, once passed, this bill would allow prairie farmers to seek their own contracts. We are talking about the Canadian Wheat Board. Our government is committed to giving western Canadian grain farmers the marketing freedom they deserve.

We encourage the opposition to ensure the swift passage of this legislation so that western Canadian farmers can plan for the future.

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today as a Newfoundland, with a particular interest in the Newfoundland and Labrador fisheries. Last week, for example, I introduced a private member's bill, the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery rebuilding act. I rise to speak out against the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board and to warn against it.

The bays and harbours, the cliffs and crags and the fishing grounds of Newfoundland and Labrador may be a world away from the western provinces, but fishing and farming have much in common these days across Canada. At this moment in our history, what they have in common is that they are under direct attack by the Conservative government. In the Prairies, the Conservatives are attacking the livelihood of farmers with their attempts to kill off the Canadian Wheat Board. On the west and east coasts, the fisheries are their target, with ongoing moves to gut what little is left of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

What the Conservative government should realize, and must realize, is that its buddies on Bay Street cannot feed Canadian families. That is a simple fact of life.

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I do not understand why the Conservatives have it in for Canada's primary producers, fishermen and farmers. Why? Who will that benefit? Who will that threaten?

Ultimately, such actions could jeopardize our food supply, could threaten the family farm and family fishing enterprise, the small businesses on which our country was built.

As a Newfoundland and Labradorian, I am particularly baffled over why the Canadian Wheat Board is being targeted.

At the same time that the federal Conservatives are attempting to kill off the Wheat Board, back home in my home province, the Progressive Conservative provincial government is moving toward the creation of a marketing board for fish. Therefore, the federal Conservatives are killing off the Wheat Board, which markets and brands Canadian wheat and barley around the world, at the same time that the provincial PCs in Newfoundland and Labrador are attempting to create a similar type fish board to market and brand our seafood around the world. It does not make sense to me. If anything, it shows that there should be more study, more investigation and more review so smart decisions are made.

The federal Conservatives are killing the Wheat Board, while the provincial PCs are birthing a fish board. I just do not get it. How does that make sense? The responsible and right thing to do would be to carry out a cost benefit analysis.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the largest and most successful grain marketing company in the world. That is an indisputable fact. It is also a fact that the Wheat Board is a Canadian success story, with a proven track record of providing the best possible returns for farmers and minimizing their risk.

Why mess with a good thing? Why mess with something that is working?

As the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre has pointed out in the House on numerous occasions, there has never been one shred of evidence that farmers would be better off without the Wheat Board. That is a point that has resonated with me and it should resonate with everybody in the House and with all Canadians,

•(1320)

How can the Conservative government, which bills itself as being a great steward of the Canadian economy in these tough economic times and which are destined to get tougher, be so reckless and irresponsible, to use two other words from the member for Winnipeg Centre, as to turn the prairie farm economy on its head without even doing a cost benefit analysis? That does not make sense to me.

Bill C-18 proposes to dismantle the farmer-controlled and funded Canadian Wheat Board by eliminating the single desk marketing of wheat and barley across Canada, but do farmers want that? Apparently not.

On September 12, a majority of farmers voted in a plebiscite to keep the Wheat Board. A total of 38,261 farmers submitted mail-in ballots during that plebiscite. It had a participation rate of 56%, which was, as I understand it, on a par with the last three federal elections. The result was that 62% of respondents voted in favour of

retaining the single desk for wheat, while 51% voted to retain it for barley.

Allen Oberg, chair of the Wheat Board's farmer-controlled board of directors, reacted by saying this:

Farmers have spoken. Their message is loud and clear, and the government must listen. Western Canadian producers have voted to keep their single-desk marketing system for wheat and barley. They cannot be ignored.

Sure they can be ignored. Have they not heard of the Conservative government? For years, fishermen on the east coast of Canada, the fishermen of Newfoundland and Labrador, warned that they were not being listened to. The fishery eventually collapsed. One of the largest fishing companies, Fishery Products International, was later broken up and sold off piecemeal, including its the marketing arm.

Today Newfoundland and Labrador PCs are moving toward a marketing board for Newfoundland and Labrador seafood products. The Conservative government is trying to move away from it.

Part of the marketing strategy would be to set up a council to promote Newfoundland and Labrador seafood in general. The government would also facilitate a consortium of companies so they could work together on branding their seafood products. Maybe they will even called it the Canadian fish board. Would that not be ironic?

The New Democrats say that the Conservative government should withdraw Bill C-18. In the interests of large American grain companies, the Conservatives are meddling to erode prices and market security for our own farmers.

The Canadian Wheat Board is a single desk. Farmers in western Canada sell their wheat and barley together through the Wheat Board, their sole marketing agent. The structure helps ensure farmers get their highest overall return, as it has an effective monopoly on the sales. Farmers have more strength when they act as one. It just makes sense. Fishermen have more strength when they act as one. Newfoundland and Labrador fishermen know this and prairie farmers know this. Why does the Conservative government not know this?

Western grain farmers can look to Australia to know what is in store for them once the single desk is eliminated, and it is not pretty. When Australia had its single desk power, Australian wheat could command premiums of over \$99 a tonne over American wheat, but by December 2008, it had dropped to a discount of \$27 a tonne over U.S. wheat. In three short years, Australia's 40,000 wheat farmers went from running their own grain marketing system, selling virtually all of Australia's wheat, to becoming mere customers of Cargill, one of the largest agribusiness corporations, which is privately owned by the U.S.

Government Orders

•(1325)

If we are not careful, the family farm and the family fishing enterprises of this great country will be no more. We should learn from the mistakes of the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery. We should listen to fishermen and farmers. We are stronger—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is very interesting to listen to his speaking notes. Is he actually serious that Australian farmers were getting \$3 a bushel more than U.S. farmers at one point? I do not think so. That is not even realistic.

However, he quoted the survey of the Wheat Board and he gave great credence to it. I want to ask him a couple of questions about some of the ballots. I know an older lady whose husband died last year. When it came time for the survey, she received a ballot for herself, a ballot for her dead husband and a ballot for the estate as well.

I know another little old lady who approached one of our political leaders and said that she wanted to talk about the Wheat Board. She told him that her brother and sister, who were both dead, received ballots for the Wheat Board vote. I also point out that I know some folks who farm 10,000 acres who are identified as pro-choice. They did not get ballots at all.

Could he explain some of those inconsistencies and why does he give credence to such a flawed survey?

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, in terms of particular ballots for the plebiscite, I have no idea. I know that when I read the final tally, that 62% of respondents voted in favour of retaining the single desk for wheat, I wonder how the Conservative government cannot see the results of this plebiscite as a warning signal. There is as a storm brewing. There is a problem with the fact that the government is killing the Canadian Wheat Board. How does the Conservative government not recognize the 62% as a warning sign?

I have a question for the member opposite. It makes sense to carry out a cost benefit analysis. The member for Winnipeg Centre has consistently brought it up in the House. Why is there no cost benefit analysis? Is he afraid of the result?

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague from St. John's South—Mount Pearl a general question with which all members of Parliament should be concerned. He is a relatively new MP, but I am sure he is aware of the code of conduct and conflict of interest guidelines that all of us are duty bound and honour bound to uphold.

The member of Parliament for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, who was harassing him with some nuisance and mischief questions, is a grain farmer. It is the position of his government that grain producers in the prairie region will be able to sell their grain for more if it gets rid of the Wheat Board. If what he says is true, does that not put him in a direct conflict of interest and should he not be duty bound and honour bound to recuse himself from that vote, just as the member for Macleod, the member for Yellowhead, the member for Prince

Albert, the member for Crowfoot, the member for Red Deer, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright, possibly the member for Peace River and possibly the member for Blackstrap would be? Should not all of those grain producers recuse themselves from this vote because they stand to benefit personally and directly if their own rhetoric and profit—

•(1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, a shorter answer please.

Mr. Ryan Cleary: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. I am a relatively new member of Parliament. Prior to my election this past May as the MP for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, I was a journalist. I spent 20 years as a journalist in Newfoundland and Labrador. I can say for the member for Winnipeg Centre that if I have ever heard anything that sounds like a conflict of interest, it is exactly this.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's main priority is the economy, in which the agricultural industry plays a huge role. Canadian producers feed families around the world. They deserve the freedom to choose how to market their products, whether it is done individually or through a voluntary pooling organization.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this debate and to correct some incorrect hypotheses and assumptions, such as that allowing wheat and barley producers in western Canada to choose how to market their product would undermine our supply management system.

[English]

Our government's support for marketing freedom for western wheat, durum and barley producers is an issue entirely separate from our support for supply management. There is no link between these two issues, and those who try, such as the opposition, to make links between providing marketing freedom to western Canadian grain producers and our government's commitment to support Canada's supply-managed system are doing so at the expense of farmers.

Such efforts are scare tactics that the opposition should refrain from, because its arguments are untrue and because these tactics do not serve farmers well. This is fearmongering. It is not productive because it unnecessarily destabilizes farmers who are not affected by the Wheat Board legislation.

[Translation]

I am a member of Parliament from eastern Ontario. I am very familiar with supply management and I wholeheartedly support our supply management system and the farmers who depend on it. I would like to explain some of the differences between the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management.

Government Orders

[English]

Producers in the five supply-managed industries—dairy, chicken, turkey, egg and broiler hatching eggs—worked long and hard to establish these systems. There was clear support by farmers in all cases for the implementation of the supply management system before federal and provincial governments put it in place. Producers who participate in our supply-managed system are supportive of it, and they thank our government for our strong defence of supply management.

This is clearly not the case with the Wheat Board. There is no unanimous support for the Wheat Board and its monopoly.

[Translation]

Supply management works with quotas that are based on consumer demand. That is not the case with the Canadian Wheat Board. In addition, the supply management system applies to all regions of Canada, while the Canadian Wheat Board applies only to western farmers.

[English]

It is important to note that supply management is focused on domestic consumption. The Wheat Board, however, is largely focused on export markets.

I congratulate the opposition in recognizing that both supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board relate to agriculture, but the opposition's lack of understanding is exasperating, because the similarities end there.

It is important to recognize that the vast majority of opposition MPs are from non-rural ridings in provinces not under the control of the Wheat Board.

[Translation]

The Canadian Wheat Board is a regional shared-governance organization. Right now, if you cultivate wheat, durum or barley in western Canada and you want to export it for food purposes, you must sell it to the Canadian Wheat Board. The board is far from being universally accepted, as is the case with the supply management system, and many producers want the same freedom enjoyed by farmers in the rest of Canada.

• (1335)

[English]

The Canadian Wheat Board itself conducts an annual survey of its producers, and the most recent results showed that a majority of prairie wheat producers, 58%, said that they would prefer either to have a market with no Canadian Wheat Board at all or to have the choice to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board or not.

Marketing choice, or dual marketing, which is what our bill proposes to implement, was the most popular choice when wheat producers were asked to choose between three options of no change to the Canadian Wheat Board, no Canadian Wheat Board at all, or a dual market. Apparently the CWB did not like the answer, because it decided to hold its so-called plebiscite.

This plebiscite was deeply flawed in its design, only offering farmers an all-or-nothing scenario. The option of marketing choice

was not even provided to farmers, even though the CWB has been told for years that when given the option, this is precisely what the majority of western grain farmers want. This may lead one to question whether the CWB intentionally framed the questions on its so-called plebiscite in such a way as to produce the answers that it wanted.

[Translation]

The official opposition should also take note that we supported supply management in our election platform. But the NDP election platform made absolutely no mention of it.

The NDP's veiled position on supply management during the election and its feigned indignation today do not fool anyone in the agriculture sector.

[English]

Over the past 40 years, supply management has been a source of stability and prosperity for dairy, chicken, turkey and egg producers right across the country. Supply management is important to the rural economy of Canada from British Columbia all the way to Newfoundland. Supply management creates jobs and prosperity for Canadians. Supply-managed producers listen to consumers and deliver what Canadians want. We promote and defend supply management because it has been so successful and has brought so many benefits to consumers, producers and others in the industry right across the value chain.

[Translation]

However, grain producers in western Canada have been saying for years that they want the opportunity to make their own business decisions. A consistent majority of barley producers have said that they do not want to be forced to sell their product solely to the Canadian Wheat Board.

[English]

As I mentioned earlier, this is not the case with supply management, whose producers strongly support their marketing systems. Our long-standing and continuing support for supply management and our commitment to marketing choice for western Canadian grain producers reflect our government's dedication to giving farmers what they need to succeed. We believe that all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them. An open market for western Canadian grain producers would attract investment, encourage innovation, create value-added jobs and build a stronger Canadian economy.

[Translation]

Our government is committed to implementing the most profitable programs and processes for producers and the industry as a whole

I implore the members to think seriously about this bill and remember that if it is passed in a timely manner, producers will be reassured and will be able to plan their activities for the coming year.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the question I have for the member is with regard to why the government appears not to want to respect the wishes of a majority of the prairie wheat farmers.

Does the member across the way believe in principle that the grain farmer, who is directly impacted by the government's decision, should have the ability to have some input as to what the government is doing today? Would he support prairie farmers being able to have direct influence on what is happening with the Wheat Board?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, my response to my colleague is that it is obvious that we support western Canadian grain farmers. I point out to my colleague that when he talks about feedback from western Canadian grain farmers, I mentioned that the Wheat Board itself conducted a survey or poll of its farmers, which it does every single year, and when it did, it offered three choices. This was before the so-called plebiscite. They offered three choices to farmers: no Wheat Board at all, a Wheat Board monopoly or marketing freedom, meaning that the Wheat Board would exist but that farmers would be free to choose whether they would use it. Fifty-eight per cent of western Canadian wheat farmers chose wanting to have marketing freedom and to have a choice in whether or not to use the Wheat Board.

After that, the Wheat Board conducted its so-called plebiscite and only asked two questions. It offered all or nothing: either the Wheat Board with its mandatory lock on western grain farmers or no Wheat Board at all. The third question was missing. I have to ask why.

The other thing I will point out is that it is interesting to note that there are 57 MPs who represent grain farmers in western Canada affected by the Canadian Wheat Board. Of those 57 MPs, 52 are Conservative and 5 are opposition. That is very telling. We just had a federal election in May. The member is asking if we represent Canadian wheat farmers. We absolutely do, 52 seats out of 57.

• (1340)

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture is from Ontario, and I want to thank him for all that he does and has done for agriculture across Canada, not just in Ontario.

The comments from the other side illustrate that the Wheat Board, in some way, seems to be to the farmers. The farmers have grown quality wheat. Could the parliamentary secretary clarify whose wheat it is, who grows it and what the Canadian Wheat Board in the west actually does with the wheat?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, it is definitely the case that western wheat farmers feel the Wheat Board does not act for their best interests when it comes to selling wheat. That is why they want marketing freedom.

The growers of the wheat are the farmers themselves. One thing we have noticed is that farmers who used to grow only wheat are now growing other crops that are not controlled by Wheat Board. For example, there are more and more canola farmers. Why is that? Yes, canola makes good money on the market, but it is not controlled by the Wheat Board. We are seeing a trend. This is a reflection of the

damaging effect that the Wheat Board can have on our wheat producers.

What we are asking for is marketing freedom. I do not know what the opposition members have against the word "freedom". They should allow western farmers to choose to use the Wheat Board or not. If the Wheat Board has the value-added services that it says it offers, let it sell itself to farmers so that farmers will willingly choose it.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real pleasure to rise and support an economic sector that is critical to jobs and growth in this country. Make no mistake, Canadian farmers feed the world and they deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions.

Canada's farmers and food processors do more than produce the food for our tables, they drive over \$35 billion of our exports and generate one in every eight Canadian jobs. The grain sector alone is specifically responsible for \$16 billion to the farm gate and it is a major contributor to our economy. The agriculture industry has helped lead Canada's economic recovery and that is why it is a priority for the government.

The legislation that we have before us will help this vital economic sector continue to drive our country to new growth and prosperity. It will provide western Canadian wheat, durum and barley farmers with the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world. It will allow grain producers in western Canada to make decisions based on what is best for their businesses, for their farms, for themselves.

I want to reiterate why marketing freedom is so vital to farmers in our grain industry. As we have heard the Minister of Agriculture say often, our government wants to help farmers make money from the marketplace, not from the mail box. Often that means levelling the playing field on the international stage. Sometimes it means getting government out of the way, so that farmers can farm and continue to drive our economy.

To empower our agricultural producers we need to open new markets and new avenues for profitability for farmers to accomplish that. They need the simple opportunity to succeed.

For the past six decades this has definitely not been the case for growers of wheat and barley in western Canada. The Canadian Wheat Board monopoly, born in a different time to meet different needs during the war, has cast a chill on key parts of the grain sector in western Canada. The six decade Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is yesterday's solution to yesterday's problems.

Government Orders

The fact is, today's entrepreneurial farmers are providing more and proving over and over that they can and will do better if they have control over their farm and businesses. For western Canadian grain farmers, this means a choice in how they market their own grain. It means a choice in when and where they will sell their crop. It means a choice on what price they sell their grain and between working through a voluntary Wheat Board or directly with the open market.

At the announcement in Acme, Alberta, a gentleman by the name of Bob Leinweber from Linden gave me a letter that he had written to a western producer. In it he talks about a letter from another farmer regarding the monopoly. Mr. Leinweber agrees with that individual. He wrote:

—monopoly sellers do enrich their owners as exemplified by OPEC in similar monopolies.

He went on to say:

The CWB was set up by the government as a buyer's monopoly to buy wheat from western Canadian wheat growers at less than the world price.

That was why the Wheat Board was set up. It is not a seller's monopoly, it is a buyer's monopoly. We know that western Canadian farmers are capable of marketing their own canola, pulse crops and oats. They do that already. They are also capable of marketing their wheat and barley.

I was in the dentist chair a couple of weeks ago when an elderly farmer walked in and said, "Mr. Sorenson, my father told me that having that Wheat Board would be good for us. When I told my three sons, who are now farming, they said, 'Dad, that was yesterday's problem, just get out of the way and let us do it. We are not afraid of marketing our own wheat and barley'".

• (1345)

Our government is committed to giving farmers marketing freedom; a choice that, yes, they want and they deserve. As the Prime Minister recently said in Regina, "Our government is committed to giving western grain farmers the freedom to choose how to market their products—something eastern grain farmers have long taken for granted. This is not only a matter of principle, it will also lead to real economic benefits, to opportunities for years to come. An open grain market will attract new investment, encourage innovation, and create new jobs for Canadians".

That is a point on which many industry leaders agree.

Stephen Vandervalk, president of the Grain Growers of Canada, said:

Ending the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly is clearly sending a signal that Canada is open for business. Value-added processing means value-added jobs and more opportunities for farmers to locally market their wheat.

Brian Otto, president of the Western Barley Growers Association, said recently:

I see a future for investment in Western Canadian agriculture...Under this new commercial system I see job creation and the revitalization of rural communities.

Farmers in the market need clarity and certainty that marketing freedom and an open market is on the horizon.

An open market would attract investment. It would encourage innovation and create value-added jobs, which would build a stronger economy and which would build a stronger local economy

in many of our smaller communities and in our rural communities across the west.

An open market for the grain industry would strengthen the farming sector with better returns for farmers and for Canada as a whole.

We have had a taste, a small taste, of things to come earlier this month, with an announcement of a new pasta plant opening in Regina that would buy local Canadian durum wheat from farmers and create local jobs.

This is only a beginning. I look forward to many grand openings throughout the constituency of Crowfoot and the west of value-added processing, value-added pasta plants, value-added industries beginning in our rural communities. Marketing freedom would unlock new value-added investment, new jobs and new growth for Canada's economy.

The time is right for action. Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity.

Our government will seize this opportunity for farmers. Our government will give farmers the marketing freedom they want and the marketing freedom that they deserve. Our government will free our farmers so they can continue to drive our economy and to feed the world.

Let me conclude by saying this. My grandfather moved to the place where I live, Killiam, Alberta, in 1905-06. For all those years, right up until he passed away in 1986, he farmed. I wish I could be like the member who spoke earlier who talked about the grandfather always having this fight. That was not the case with my grandfather. My grandfather said, "These are the rules. We'll abide by the rules. The Wheat Board is there. There's nothing we can do about it". He did not really step up and say, "Let's change this", although he was involved in municipal politics for 30 years.

This was never a driving force. However, over the years, less and less land got planted with wheat, less and less with barley, and there was just this drift into more and more canola, more and more pulse crops, and more and more of many of those other crops that were out of the Wheat Board's ability to market.

Canadian farmers have been voting with their air drills. They have been voting with what they are going to seed on their land. They have been putting in less and less wheat and more and more of the other crops. It is time we also allow them the ability to vote on this issue with their grain trucks and let them decide where they take their grain and to whom they market it.

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The Canadian Wheat Board, at one point, was the largest marketing agent in Canada. It has now slipped to number three, behind Viterra and Cargill. Farmers across the west realize that there are more opportunities than ever before to sell their grain and they look forward to the opportunity to have the freedom to do so.

• (1350)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Crowfoot is a veteran member of Parliament, and I am sure he is aware of the conflict of interest guidelines and the code of conduct by which all members of Parliament are duty bound.

If we were to believe the Conservative talking points, that farmers would in fact enjoy an advantage if we get rid of the Wheat Board and that they would make more money if we get rid of the Wheat Board, would the member not agree that any Conservative member of Parliament who farms, produces grain, finds himself in a conflict of interest by virtue of the fact of not just voting on this Bill C-18 but even participating in the debate promoting Bill C-18?

When we bailed out the auto industry, the GM and Chrysler auto companies, there were Conservative members of Parliament who actually had car dealerships, even though neither of them were GM nor Chrysler, but they had the decency to recuse themselves from the debate associated with subsidizing the auto industry.

Would the member not agree that he, himself, and at least seven other Conservative MPs must recuse themselves from the debate and the vote on Bill C-18?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I have run in five elections and been very clear that I believed in marketing freedom in all of those elections.

I think people expect me to stand here and vote, as I would expect most union members in the NDP would vote on issues that deal with unions. I am not certain how many of the NDP members voted on the postal agreement that we had. I think most of them voted.

Members on this side have never stood and said that we are going to receive more dollars for our wheat than we would under the Wheat Board. We have said that we want the freedom to choose. The rhetoric from the NDP and the Liberals is that there will be no markets, no rural Canada, no farmer left, and that the sky is falling.

On this side of the House, we have said that we want the opportunity to market our grain. Some may indeed decide to stay in the Wheat Board. That is why I like this approach that the government is taking. We have said that we do not want to get rid of the Wheat Board. It is the monopoly we want to get rid of, the single desk. We want to make certain that the Wheat Board is still viable. We have put in many new opportunities for the Wheat Board to become involved in marketing grain that it has not had before.

I look forward to this vote.

• (1355)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the remarks made by the member for Crowfoot and to what he was quoting from constituents.

We have been getting calls from quite a few of his constituents. I wonder why he never quoted some of them. They are saying that

when they talk to this member, all they get from him is, "We disagree on ideology", and that is about the end of the conversation.

I found it interesting that he talked about his grandfather wanting to follow the rules, yet in his remarks the member goes on and talks about the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly lasting six decades as if it was the same thing. This member knows that the board was changed in 1997 to a farmer elected directors board, and this member is denying those producers a right to vote.

We in the Liberal Party are not saying, "The sky is falling", we are saying that those members on that side are taking away farmers' democratic rights. I have to ask the member, why is he taking away the farmers' rights to determine their destiny through a vote, for or against the Wheat Board?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question coming from the former president of the National Farmers Union. This member stood and voted against the gun registry, and this member now stands voting against farmers' freedom for marketing grain.

We are not changing it so that there is no Wheat Board. This is where the court challenge may come from some farmer groups. We are not taking exclusive grains. We are not taking grains out of the Wheat Board's purview.

We are allowing the CWB to move into other provinces. We are allowing interprovincial transfer of grains. We are allowing the Wheat Board to function in other parts of Canada. We are not simply saying that we want to get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. We want to give it the opportunity to flourish in Ontario, like this member believes it very well may.

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I, too, listened to my hon. colleague talk about the Wheat Board and the benefits of having choice. That is really what the whole debate is about, whether we have a choice of how we market the products that we invest all of our life's energy and finances in growing.

I have a question for the member opposite in relation to the question that was just asked. Does he really believe that we should be jailing farmers, as was done under a previous administration, for growing and selling their grain? Does he really believe they should be in prison for doing that?

Statements by Members

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, that was a dark point in Canada's history when farmers stepped out to say that they wanted the opportunity to market their grain, to access higher prices across the border and to sell when and where they chose, and the Liberal government of the day responded by throwing in prison those who wanted that freedom. Law-abiding farmers, like Jim Ness, Rick Strankman, Tom Jackson and others, who had never broken the law and who had never stepped out even in the smallest place, were thrown into jail because the government lived with the ideology of big government doing everything for them. It was a sad mark on Canada and one that we want to clean up.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Wednesday, even though the Davie shipyard was completely shut out of the \$33 billion in contracts awarded to two of the three major shipyards in Canada, the NDP critic said, "This is a very good day for Canada, not just for the two winning shipyards. But we are also happy to see that all of Canada will benefit."

But, shipyards in eastern Quebec, in Matane and Les Méchins, were disqualified in favour of a strategy that groups the contracts in Nova Scotia and British Columbia. Faced with public outcry in Quebec, the NDP is now trying to amend its position by recognizing the interests of Quebecers, albeit a bit too late and without conviction.

The fact is that Quebec is an afterthought for this government and is a burden to the official opposition. The truth is that in this House, the federalist parties are happy for Canada even when it is a sad day for Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

BRIDGE AWARDS

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, October 22, youth from the Blood Indian reserve, the town of Cardston and communities in the surrounding area presented the Bridge Awards, acknowledging the support of dozens of organizations and individuals who have contributed to building a more socially inclusive community and bridging the historical distance between local cultures, an ongoing project participants call Oneheart.

During the awards ceremony, first nation and non-native youth entertained guests with songs, speeches, dance and drama presentations. Earlier in the day, a play written, directed, produced and performed by local first nation youth called "A Tribute to the Highway of Tears" was presented. Later, Oneheart participants met and mingled with leaders from the Blood tribe, the town of Cardston and with provincial and federal representatives at an honoured guests dinner.

This event came to pass largely through the tenacity and vision of Sharon Unger and the Shinah House Foundation that she founded, and marks a major leap forward toward a new era of unity within diversity in the southern Alberta region.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SAINT FRANÇOIS ARCHIPELAGO

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, north of my riding, on the Mille îles river, is the Saint François archipelago, which is made up of the Saint-Joseph, Vaches and Saint-Pierre islands.

These islands are a prime location for a fauna and flora conservation area and they have great potential for ecotourism and recreation. Two conservation organizations, Éco-Nature and "Sauvons nos trois grandes îles", have collaborated on research proving that the archipelago absolutely must be protected for its extraordinary nature and its ecosystem.

More than 40,000 people have already signed a petition calling on the appropriate authorities to acquire these 200 hectares of land and conserve this environment. By protecting this space, all those who depend on it will be sure to enjoy better physical and mental health.

I want to thank the members of "Sauvons nos trois grandes îles" for their hard work and I sincerely hope they achieve what they have set out to do.

* * *

[*English*]

YMCA CAMPS

Mr. Ed Holder (London West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I advise the House that thousands of London kids will now be able to experience camp for the first time in their lives.

Thanks to a dedicated team of volunteers, a group that I was privileged to chair, our Y Fore Kids committee raised more than \$1 million in just nine years, and created an endowment that will send less privileged kids from our London region to YMCA camps. To raise \$1 million is an extraordinary event and this \$1 million endowment will be the gift that keeps on giving.

Colleagues, we all know how a camp experience can create better kids through leadership, opportunity and hope in a safe learning environment.

For these children, London's kids, Canada's kids, this will serve as one of the singular most powerful experiences they will ever receive.

I need to thank our sponsors and donors and especially want to acknowledge our title sponsors, Stevenson & Hunt Insurance, Hilton London and TD Bank. Their generosity and those of hundreds of other corporations over the years have our deepest gratitude.

For all of our volunteers, from the kids who will never know who they are but whose lives they have changed forever, we thank them for caring so much.

*Statements by Members***ROGERS COMMUNICATIONS**

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to offer congratulations to Rogers Communications as it celebrates its 50th anniversary.

For years, Rogers has connected communities like mine by investing in the creation and the development of first class local programming. Shows like *Grand Central*, *Skyways*, *Out of the Fog* are where Newfoundlanders and Labradorians come together to hear and discuss the stories that matter.

This year alone, Rogers TV will produce thousands of hours of informative local programming in Newfoundland and Labrador, benefiting constituents like mine.

Rogers local commitment extends past community broadcasting. OMNI Television and Citytv connect multicultural and urban communities across the country. Rogers Media Funds has invested millions in the development and distribution of quality Canadian television and film production from coast to coast to coast.

Throughout its history, Rogers Communications has truly understood that local matters.

On behalf of the Liberal caucus, I congratulate Rogers Communications.

* * *

● (1405)

[Translation]

SOLANGE PARENT

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, small gestures often make a big difference. Solange Parent embodied the spirit of kindness for her community and her family—her husband, Clément, and her children, Sylvain, Ghislain and Évelyne. She was a loving wife, devoted mother and kind-hearted grandmother who was always there for her family. Her infectious smile did not go unnoticed by young and old alike in the Lotbinière RCM.

On a daily basis, Solange humbly exemplified the values of sharing, caring and friendship. She was without question a courageous woman who brought happiness and good humour to all those around her.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of my community. I would like to say what a privilege it has been, for the Lotbinière RCM, to have had such an exceptional woman as Solange Parent in our midst. Our thoughts and prayers are with her family.

* * *

COMMUNITY SERVICE ORGANIZATION IN CAP-ROUGE

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to recognize the 35th anniversary of the Mouvement des services à la communauté du Cap-Rouge and congratulate this network of dedicated volunteers on the support it provides to low-income individuals and families, as well as to seniors, and on its cultural contribution.

This organization offers a place where people can meet, find a listening ear, talk and obtain referrals. It also offers many services

such as a food bank, meals on wheels, activities for seniors, help for new mothers, family activities and a flea market.

I would like to draw the hon. members' attention to the fact that it is unacceptable that, in a society as rich as ours, despite the commendable efforts of organizations such as this one, needs are increasing and the contribution of such organizations is becoming increasingly essential.

Mouvement des services à la communauté du Cap-Rouge and its many volunteers have been helping to improve the lives of people in my riding since 1976, and I would like to thank them for their wonderful and exemplary work.

* * *

[English]

VETERANS

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, I attended the "Honouring our Local Veterans" celebration in Owen Sound. This 11th annual event, hosted by the Billy Bishop Home and Museum and the Royal Canadian Legion Branch 6, is one of the longest-running programs of its kind in Canada.

Over the past 11 years, over 83 local veterans who served in the army, navy, merchant marines or air force have been honoured at this event. Ten more local veterans were honoured yesterday for their courageous service to the Canadian Forces. They were: Glen Rawson, Gladys Morris, Howard Donovan, Charles Dell, Michael Krulicki, Art Hawes, Percy Straight, Lorne Weatherall, Eric Eastwood and Yvonne Inkster.

Participating in events such as this gives me the opportunity to reflect on the dedication and tremendous personal sacrifices of our men and women in uniform.

With November 11 just around the corner, I encourage everyone to attend a Remembrance Day ceremony in their communities or to simply take a few moments out of the day to reflect, to respect and to remember. Let us not forget.

* * *

CANADIAN LIBRARY MONTH

Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform the House that the month of October has been designated as Canadian Library Month. The Canadian Library Association and library partners from across the country developed this idea in order to help raise public awareness of the valuable role that libraries play in the lives of Canadians.

The theme for this year is "Your Library: A place Unbound", which suggests that, as part of a changing world, libraries are growing and expanding their resources as they connect people to information and reading. Libraries are places of endless opportunity and play a key role in providing all Canadians with access to the material that is integral to ensuring that they are regular contributors to the economic, social and cultural successes of their communities.

Statements by Members

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Canadian Library Association on the great work it does. I am sure my colleagues in the House will join me in celebrating libraries and all those who work in them, recognizing the incredible range of resources and services they provide within our communities.

•(1410)

[Translation]

DORIS CHAMPAGNE

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour for me to speak in the House as the representative for the people of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Today, I would like to highlight the extraordinary work done by volunteers in my riding, since they are the driving force behind our communities.

In particular, I would like to acknowledge the exceptional work of Doris Champagne, who was named volunteer of the year in Argenteuil. From a very early age, Mr. Champagne has volunteered to organize a number of activities to support the well-being of others in his community. He continues to work tirelessly to improve living conditions for seniors.

Mr. Champagne is president of Villa Mont-Joie in Lachute, which celebrated its 30th anniversary this October. Villa Mont-Joie, which has over 400 members, serves as a meeting place for retirees and pre-retirees in Lachute. Mr. Champagne is always working to enrich the lives of its members.

Mr. Champagne's long-time involvement in his community is an inspiration and an example to all volunteers in the community. Congratulations, Mr. Champagne. We wish you well.

[English]

**WALTER BORDEN-WILKINS, MATTHEW DELLER,
TANNER HILDEBRAND AND VINCENT STOVER**

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, mourning continues today in my community of Grande Prairie after a tragic automobile accident left four families grieving the loss of their sons, brothers and grandsons.

Late Friday night, five members of the Grande Prairie Composite High School football team were travelling home when they were struck by a speeding pickup truck.

By morning we learned that four of these young men had lost their lives and the fifth was being treated in a hospital in Edmonton.

Words fail us at times like this. There are no words to adequately express our sympathy for the families, friends and teammates. Our thoughts and prayers are with each one of them at this time of tragedy.

On behalf of myself, members of the House and the Government of Canada, I wish to express our most profound sympathy. Our

thoughts and prayers are with those who grieve this tremendous loss. May they find some peace in the anguish and some hope in the grief.

Matthew, Vincent, Walter and Tanner will be remembered.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no business case for abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board, and members across find themselves in an untenable catch-22, because if we believe the minister's supposition that prairie farmers will make more money if they abolish the Canadian Wheat Board, then any prairie farmers in the Conservative caucus would find themselves in conflict of interest and therefore both duty bound and honour bound to recuse themselves not just from the vote we will be holding tonight, but from any debate that promotes the abolition of the Wheat Board.

They cannot have it both ways. If they believe the minister, then they cannot vote on it. If they accept our point of view that there is no provable material benefit for farmers from abolishing the Wheat Board, then it raises the question of why we would turn the rural prairie economy upside down and on its head if there is no advantage to prairie farmers.

It is a conflict of interest, plain and simple. I refer hon. members to section 8 of the code of conduct that governs all of us in this House.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow farmers will gather in Lethbridge for a reunion. It will be a bittersweet time.

Nine years ago 13 farmers went to jail for a cause they believe in. Reports from October 31, 2002 said:

There were few dry eyes in front of the Lethbridge courthouse Halloween afternoon as 13 upstanding citizens hugged their loved ones and marched resolutely off to prison.

Premier Ralph Klein told the crowd of 600, "When decent, hardworking Alberta farmers are willing to take the extreme measure of going to jail for the sake of fundamental freedoms, there's something wrong with the laws of the land. It's a system that has to be changed".

That system is now being changed.

The Liberal government had persecuted these farmers in every way possible, bringing the resources of several government departments against individual Canadians. These farmers would not back down. They stood fearlessly for what they knew to be right, and they paid a huge price for it.

Tomorrow they will be meeting to celebrate our commitment to marketing freedom. Their sacrifice will not be in vain.

• (1415)

[Translation]

CBC/RADIO-CANADA

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CBC, an integral part of Canada's social fabric, is celebrating its 75th anniversary. The CBC and Radio-Canada are our source for information and entertainment a reflection of who we are and our social conscience.

Les Belles Histoires des pays d'en haut, Bobino et Bobinette, La Semaine verte, Moi et l'autre, Les Couche-tard, La P'tite Vie and, of course, hockey and the national news have all made an impact on our lives.

And I have not even mentioned the radio—which is always there, always part of our day—or the Internet, which is increasingly present in our lives. Add to this the other TV networks, which include CBC News Network, Bold and Documentary, and it is easy to see why Pierre Karl is so jealous. As Bernard Derome would say, I predict that if the trend continues, in 25 years, the CBC will be celebrating its 100th anniversary.

The Liberal Party congratulates CBC/Radio-Canada on its 75th anniversary and says to the Conservatives, “Hands off our CBC.”

[English]

UKRAINIAN DAY

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 120 years ago the first immigrants from Ukraine landed in Halifax, having endured weeks at sea on the first leg of their epic journey, migrating to begin a new life in the wilds of the Canadian prairies, the untamed wilderness and unbroken land then called the Northwest Territories.

With herculean effort and indomitable pioneer spirit they persevered, cleared land, seeded crops and built their first homes from the very sod of the land they cleared. Families grew, churches were built and communities prospered.

Today we celebrate Ukrainian Day on Parliament Hill and celebrate the heritage of those early pioneers, people of resolute determined will like my wife's great-grandfather, John P. Taschuk, who arrived with his wife Barbara and their two sons, Elia and Theodosie.

The 1.2 million Canadians of Ukrainian ancestry today celebrate the legacy of those first Ukrainian pioneers and the trek that began 120 years ago.

[Member spoke in Ukrainian]

[Translation]

RICK HANSEN

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge the 25th anniversary of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour.

Oral Questions

In 1985, Mr. Hansen set out on a 40,000 km tour in his wheelchair. For over two years, he wheeled through 34 countries on four continents. Inspired by his belief that “anything is possible”, he raised awareness around the world of the potential of people with disabilities. He raised \$26 million and every penny went to spinal cord injury research.

Although his dream to make the world more accessible and inclusive has not come true yet, Rick Hansen has contributed greatly to improving life for people with disabilities.

This Tuesday, Mr. Hansen will be on the Hill to mark the 25th anniversary of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour. It will truly be an honour for me to meet him during that ceremony.

Congratulations on this anniversary and long live the Rick Hansen Foundation.

[English]

PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime and gave our government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. There are few parts of that mandate more important than protecting the most vulnerable in our society, our children.

That is why our government has taken strong action to protect Canadians from pedophiles and sexual predators. We have strengthened the national sex offender registry, the DNA databank and our criminal record check system to ensure that sex offenders do not fall through the cracks.

We have also legislated mandatory reporting of child pornography by Internet service providers, and recently, in the safe streets and communities act, we proposed mandatory minimum sentences for those who commit sexual offences against children as well as ending the shameful practice of allowing pardons for child molesters.

Shamefully, the opposition has obstructed these measures. I call on the NDP to start putting the rights of—

The Speaker: The hon. member is out of time.

Oral questions, the hon. Leader of the Opposition.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

TURKEY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all members of the House share the grief and pain of the Turkish people following Sunday's earthquake.

Can the government provide an update on the situation, on the assistance that is available to Canadian citizens in Turkey, and on how Canada can help if asked to do so by the Turkish government?

Oral Questions

● (1420)

[*English*]

Can the government give us an update on Canada's response following the earthquake in Turkey?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like all Canadians, this government shares concern with the events in Turkey and the recent earthquake. As members know, the Canadian government has at its disposal certain assets and resources that can be deployed to assist if we receive a request. As of this point in time, we have not yet received a request from the Turkish government for such assistance, but we are fortunate that we are in a position to be able to respond if necessary.

* * *

[*Translation*]**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the F-35 saga continues. First we had delays and cost overruns; now the technical difficulties are mounting. We learned today that these fighter jets will be delivered to Canada without communications equipment that functions in the Arctic. That is really something. Pilots of military aircraft operating in the Arctic primarily use satellite communications, but that does not work with the F-35s.

How can this government continue to justify the F-35s?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going with the F-35 because it is the result of a competitive process that was carried out.

[*English*]

We are proposing to deliver to Canadian Forces the resources and equipment it needs to be able to protect Canadian sovereignty and security and to ensure that our defences are strong. The F-35 will have all the capabilities necessary to do so, including that primary, critically important mission of ensuring our northern sovereignty is protected.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at what costs? This is incredible. The F-35s Canada is buying cannot be refuelled mid-air with existing air force equipment, and they cannot land on short runways in Canada's north. Now we learn that our brave pilots will not be able to communicate while patrolling our Arctic airspace. Can members believe this?

What will happen to "the True North strong and free" if we buy a jet that cannot operate in the Arctic?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Opposition asked if I can believe that, and the answer is "no". I cannot believe a single thing she said in that question, because those statements are all false. The reality is that we are delivering to our air force the resources it needs to do the best possible job. It will have capabilities that will be state of the art, the only fifth generation fighter of its kind.

We are going to ensure the air force can do the job that the opposition would rather it did not do.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the list of flaws with the F-35 is a long one. It includes bulkhead cracks, airflow problems, poor parts reliability, wing roll-off issues, drive shaft stretching and compressing, actuators burning too fast, defective lift fan, clutch and generator problems. The F-35s cannot even land on our short Arctic runways or communicate in the Canadian north, and the price tag per plane is double the government's claim.

Is the associate minister still planning on buying 65 of these things?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is a stretch of credibility is that the member opposite and his party, on every occasion, take every chance they can to try to denigrate the efforts of this government to invest in the Canadian Forces.

With respect to the F-35, as was just stated, this is a state-of-the-art fifth generation aircraft that will provide us sovereignty in our north and the ability to be interoperable with our important partners, the United States of America and other partners within this program. The F-35 is the best plane for the best pilots in the Canadian air force.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is no logical or reasonable explanation for the government's inflexibility on the F-35s. The government is stubbornly awarding a \$30 billion contract for these jets without any kind of framework or bidding process. Not only was the process not transparent, but we now learn that the jets do not even work in the north.

Will Conservatives now admit that \$150 million per piece is a bit expensive for a plane that does not even work?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, again, the premise of the member's question is completely false, including the cost of this aircraft, which is \$9 billion.

With respect to the operational requirements for communications in the north, this aircraft will have state of the art communications. We will not be taking receipt of the aircraft for another five years. We are working closely with the F-35 partners within the consortium to see that it has all of the operational capability for the 21st century.

● (1425)

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after listening to the government House leader and the Minister of National Defence, one is inclined to ask the question, exactly what new piece of information will it take for the government to realize that an open tendering process is now required to make sure we get the best possible plane at the best possible price?

I would say in praise of the Minister of National Defence that the process that was run on shipbuilding was tremendous. Why not do the same thing for the F-35s?

Oral Questions

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member himself should know, there was a competitive process that resulted in the selection of the F-35. If he believes that process is deficient, that is a criticism of his own party which ran that process.

We acknowledge that the processes we are developing now made improvements and enhancements, but I can say that disrupting an already tendered process midstream is no way to create confidence among our military and among those who wish to bid for contracts. Part of playing by the rules is that one actually has to follow the rules once they are set.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are actually going to be able to have a discussion about facts. The government House leader's description of the process prior to the Harper government coming into office is in fact not correct.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I think the hon. member caught his mistake and I know he will refrain from using proper names.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, a fatal technical error on my part; I should say the reactionary government which took office in 2006.

The fact is nothing in that process in which Canada participated required Canada to buy a single jet at any price whatsoever. That is the truth and the government House leader knows it. He is raising a completely bogus argument when he talks about breaking a contract. There is no contract to break.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it may be that the leader of the third party is reaching back into his old days with another party and that he does not want to see a contract to purchase any aircraft.

The fact is the process had commenced, a process that commenced under the Liberal government which resulted in the selection of a preferred piece of equipment for the Canadian armed forces, the F-35, and that process set the path. We are continuing on that path and working with the suppliers to ensure that our forces have the very best equipment possible to meet our needs, including that of defending Arctic sovereignty.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was a member of a different party in 2001. Allow me to simply ask a question, once again. The fact is that the government of the Netherlands, other European governments, the Japanese and the Koreans have all made different arrangements with the suppliers of this aircraft. Our problem is that the government is taking an obstinate, ideological position when it has another opportunity. It demonstrated last week that we can have a competitive system.

Why—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Government in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the choice that has been made for the F-35 to assist our military and provide the forces the equipment they need. We are also very proud that at this

time when we are trying to deliver economic benefits, jobs and economic growth, including to important regions like Toronto and Montreal, we are able to do so through the benefits that are coming from this program. We are going to have jobs created in those areas in the state of the art aerospace industry. That is something the member would have us put to a halt and kill those jobs. We will not kill those jobs. We want to see jobs and economic growth for all Canadians.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the government plans a fire sale of military land, but it has not said what bases are on the line. This has left troops across the country, and the community jobs they support, wondering if they are on the chopping block. Soldiers, their families and communities deserve some transparency.

How many bases will close and how many jobs will be lost? How will these decisions be made, and will communities have a say? Canadians deserve answers and they deserve them now.

• (1430)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Hamilton Centre for his first question in his new portfolio.

The reality is that our government has made historic investments in the Canadian Forces across the board in all four pillars, whether it be in equipment, infrastructure, personnel, or readiness. The only person speculating on the closure of bases, perhaps besides the member himself, is a Liberal senator.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that begs the question, is the minister prepared to stand up right now and say that there is absolutely no truth to any of the news articles out there, and that no bases are going to close and no jobs are going to be lost?

If the minister can stand in his place and give this country that assurance, then yes, the issue will go away. If not, it will do anything but going away.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the feigned indignation of the member. However, as I said, the only person that is rattling the nerves of the Canadian Forces is the member himself and now Liberal senators.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, 1,700 employees and their families are counting on CFB Bagotville to secure their future within the Canadian Forces.

The troops in Bagotville have served their country remarkably well, and I am very proud of them. The base is one of the largest employers in the region and injects over \$125 million a year into the economy.

These families are worried about their future. Will this government tell them exactly what to expect from the additional budget cuts? Our troops deserve more respect than this.

Oral Questions

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what members of the Canadian Forces, their families and those who work in the Department of National Defence can expect is what they have seen under the now five and a half years of a Conservative government, and that is historic investments across the board, support for them and their families, the services and equipment that they need.

If the member opposite and his party were in power, we know it would be a much different story.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the 7,000 employees of CFB Valcartier are also wondering what the future holds for them.

Valcartier is home to the 5 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group, the largest operational formation in Quebec and the only francophone brigade in Canada. It injects over half a billion dollars a year into the economy.

Will this government reassure the troops, their families and the community by promising not to make any cuts to the Valcartier base?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the historic contribution of the Royal 22e Régiment, which is based in Valcartier.

[*English*]

What they, their families and the military across the country can expect is further support from this government. We know that the NDP members opposite voted consistently against every effort we have made to augment all services, equipment and personnel within the Canadian Forces.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, CFB Esquimalt's military forces continue to serve our country with honour, like the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The chair needs to be able to hear the question. The hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, this includes the HMCS Ottawa which recently returned from a four month tour duty in the Asia-Pacific region.

At the same time, this base provides hundreds of millions of dollars of economic benefits in our community. It provides jobs for 4,000 military families and more than 2,000 civilian families. These Vancouver Island families need reassurance today.

Can the minister tell us today that none of these crucial jobs at CFB Esquimalt will be cut through some reckless fire sale by the Conservatives?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member opposite and all members here today that the Conservative government will continue to make historic investments in the Canadian Forces. That is what the Canada first defence strategy was all about. That is what the decision to pursue these major procurements, whether it be for the army, navy, air force, or special forces is about. We have seen historic growth in

terms of the numbers, capability and readiness. That has been on full display in places like Afghanistan and during the mission in Libya.

We know for certain that had the members opposite in the NDP had their way, none of those investments would have happened.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, CFB Goose Bay contributes over \$75 million to Newfoundland and Labrador's GDP, and 5 Wing Goose Bay has served our country with distinction in a strategic northern location. Shutting down this base would devastate the economy of central Labrador.

Can the minister come clean and tell us whether the government will axe this major contributor to the economy of Newfoundland and Labrador, or will it keep its promise to establish a rapid reaction battalion in Goose Bay with over 600 troops?

• (1435)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the new member from Newfoundland and Labrador who is now sitting as part of the federal cabinet in the Conservative government has made incredible efforts to ensure that we continue to make these historic investments both in Gander and Goose Bay, and across the country. We will continue to do so.

It must be hypocrisy day for the NDP when it comes to the military.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SHIPBUILDING INDUSTRY

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, workers and their families, particularly those from Quebec City's south shore, are in limbo. The Davie shipbuilding company, one of the Quebec City region's economic drivers, still does not have an answer about its future.

Since the main contracts were announced last week, when does the minister intend to begin the bidding process for the remaining \$2 billion?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the national shipbuilding strategy will benefit all regions of Canada, including Quebec.

As far as Davie shipyards are concerned, as the member knows, there are over 116 smaller ships that have yet to be tendered. Davie is welcome to compete for those contracts.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mr. Denis Blanchette (Louis-Hébert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all we want to know is whether the government is going to speed up the bidding process for these contracts. This government needs to give Quebec families some answers. Can Davie, like other shipbuilding companies, expect to receive contracts? Canada's shipyards need stability in order to ensure their growth. That is the very premise of the national procurement strategy.

Can this government tell us its plan for supporting the shipyards that have not been awarded any contracts?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the important parts of the strategy is dealing with the boom and bust aspect of the shipbuilding and marine industry to which the member is referring. Of course having this long-term strategy does that, because apart from the two large packages that were awarded last week, as I said, there are contracts for 116 smaller ships, as well as \$500 million to \$600 million of maintenance work ongoing. Any shipyards outside of the two that won are welcome to bid on those.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, \$2 billion in shipbuilding contracts have yet to be awarded. The Davie shipyard is in the process of restarting operations. Thousands of direct and indirect jobs in the Quebec City area are at stake, and other shipyards in the country are in the same situation. Last week, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse was strangely silent on this topic. Shipyards that did not receive contracts are waiting.

My question is simple: when will this government start the bidding process for granting the \$2 billion?

[*English*]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, this is a national strategy that helps regions in all parts of the country.

There is expected to be 15,000 jobs created. That is just in direct jobs. We should look at the indirect opportunities for the manufacturing sector and shipyards across the country. The member has to remember that it is not just Davie, there are shipyards in every region of this country that will benefit from this strategy.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the government kills the Canadian Wheat Board single desk, it could also kill Canada's brand in global grain markets.

Private companies will no doubt try to gather up the Wheat Board's \$6 billion in annual sales to enhance shareholder value for their owners, not for farmers. Then major foreign grain corporations are likely to come calling with takeover bids.

Why does the government think farmers are better off with all key decisions about Canadian grain being made in Minneapolis, Chicago or Kansas City?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the one thing I can guarantee to the member for Wascana is that if we accept the status quo and stay where we are, that is exactly what will happen, a doomsday scenario.

What we are doing is moving ahead with marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. They will now have the ability to choose whom they market through. They are the ones, the stewards of the land, who guarantee the quality and consistency of supply. They will continue to do that. The line companies, whether they are an American, British or European multinational or a Canadian multinational like Viterra that is global in scope, they will continue to market that top-quality grain produced by our farmers.

• (1440)

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a year ago the government was forced to reverse itself on potash. The government was originally in favour of selling off the industry, but flipped.

In the wake of that confusion, the government promised a new set of takeover rules, greater clarity on net benefit, more transparency, enforceable conditions, a precise definition of strategic asset, but nothing has been produced so far.

If a big U.S. grain corporation decides to go after, say, Viterra, does the government plan to declare the Canadian grain business a strategic asset?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian farming sector across the board is a tremendous Canadian asset. We have seen growth in canola, in special crops—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. There is far too much conversation going on during the answers to the questions being posed. Let us let the minister answer the question.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, if the member for Wascana and his party had any answers for farmers, they might have actually elected a couple over there. That did not happen. That is why this government is very strong and very solid with Canadian farmers and with the Canadian farm sector, coast to coast to coast. We will continue to do that.

We know the great work that Canadian farmers do. We know it is global in scope. We know that our processors can step up and produce as well using that quality as a basis. We will continue to support Canadian farmers, in spite of those Liberals.

*Oral Questions***FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Cardigan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is gutting science from DFO. This comes at a time when a dreaded virus has been found in B.C. salmon stocks, a virus which wiped out 70% of farmed stocks in Chile. Science is needed more than ever to ensure the health and conservation of our fish stocks.

Why does the government insist on putting Canada's fish stocks and our growing aquaculture industry at even greater risk by slashing science from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing is further from the truth. The DFO and this government have made huge investments in science over the course of the last number of years, since 2006, some \$30 million, as an example, including upgrades to 13 laboratories in sites across the country and \$36 million to construct 3 new science vessels.

In terms of the ISA, the ISA issue on the west coast is concerning. However, at this time, there have been no reported findings that at all make this finding conclusive.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's ongoing incompetence in trade negotiations is once again on display. After failing to obtain an exemption to buy AmericaN rules and opening the door to Europe's big pharma, now we learn that while Conservatives pretend to deal with border thickening, Canadians will now be charged every time they cross the U.S. border.

What is the government's explanation for its latest failure at the bargaining table?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the passage of the three new free trade agreements with the U.S., which include Colombia, Panama and Korea, is a clear recognition, which we applaud, by the U.S. lawmakers that free and open trade is the best way to create jobs and economic growth.

We are, however, disappointed that the bill includes the removal of the \$5.50 tax exemption on air and sea passengers, not on all passengers, arriving to the United States from Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean. We would hope the Americans recognize the error of their ways and that free and open trade is the way out of this economic depression, not into it.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that Canadians breathed a sigh of relief when they heard that confidence from the parliamentary secretary.

When it comes to defending the interests of Canadians, Conservatives have shown they cannot be trusted: the IRS pursuing law-abiding Canadians; the EU trade deal that lays us open to big pharma; buy America provisions that make a mockery of trade reciprocity; and now a surcharge on Canadians travelling to the U.S.

When will the government abandon the platitudes and empty promises and get to work protecting the interests of Canadians?

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear that free, fair and open trade is good for Canadians and is good for the rest of the world.

I wish the NDP member from Dartmouth—Cole Harbour and his colleagues would just once in this place stand on their feet, support Canadian business, support Canadian workers and vote for free trade agreements because it will help. It will provide jobs and opportunity.

You might want to listen to your own rhetoric sometime.

• (1445)

The Speaker: The member knows to direct comments to the Chair, not directly to his colleagues.

* * *

SENIORS

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, many experts have warned that tax-free savings accounts will not help poor seniors who have little income to save. The wealthy seniors can salt away hundreds of thousands in TFSAs and still receive the guaranteed income supplement.

New Democrats proposed a better plan to increase the GIS and raise every senior out of poverty, but those Conservatives refused. They ignored those in need and instead chose another subsidy for their friends.

When will they ever get their priorities straight?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the NDP does not like lower taxes, does not like the tax-free savings account, voted against the tax-free savings account and voted against lower taxes. However, Canadians like the tax-free savings account and I will tell members how much they like it. There were 6.7 million tax-free savings accounts in Canada as of the end of the December. That is a lot of rich friends.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a tax expert has confirmed that under the current rules, a senior could have up to \$1 million in a TFSA and still be entitled to the guaranteed income supplement, a pension that is meant for seniors living below the poverty line.

Instead of helping seniors in need, TFSAs will redirect \$4 billion to the richest seniors.

Oral Questions

Is that really the government's solution to helping less fortunate seniors live in dignity?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member opposite to have a look at the law with respect to the tax-free savings account and also the facts. In the tax-free savings account legislation, which her party voted against, we ensured protection for modest and low-income Canadians. That was to ensure they could afford the tax-free savings account. As I say, 6.7 million accounts were opened, three-quarters of them opened by individuals in the two lowest tax brackets.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while the Prime Minister will be representing Canada at the upcoming APEC, Commonwealth and G20 summits to help deal with today's global economic challenges and to promote Canada's economy, the NDP is busy talking down the Canadian economy. In a period of global economic turbulence, the NDP wants to impose more and more taxes on Canadians, from a \$10 billion tax hike on businesses, a GST hike, a personal income tax hike, a new tax on everyday financial transactions and the list goes on and on.

Could the Minister of Finance explain how our government is taking a leadership role on the world stage in response to today's global economic challenges?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): We are representing Canada proudly, Mr. Speaker, by leading by example, including the strongest financial system in the world, the lowest debt to GDP ratio in the G7, the best job growth in the G7, the best place to invest in the G7. We are leading with the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and lowering taxes to create jobs. We are leading with a prudent plan to return to balanced budgets and surpluses. Now it is time for European leaders to act quickly with strong, decisive and united leadership.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats are proud to stand with the people of Libya and people across the entire Arab region as they demand rights that Canadians hold to be universal. Canada has a key role to play in fostering democratic development.

In 2008 Conservatives promised to create a democratic development institute. Why has the government broken this promise just when the centre is needed most of all?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the key element of the foreign policy of this government is promotion of democracy. That is what we are doing in Libya. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was there.

With Mr. Gadhafi gone, we are looking at helping Libya set up a constitution and move forward with the promotion of democracy. That remains the key element of foreign policy for this government.

• (1450)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has proudly supported Libyans in their efforts to end the tyranny of the Gadhafi regime. Support for disarmament and reconstruction is essential, but we have the skills, resources and expertise to do much more. Protecting human rights is a key goal of the UN support mission in Libya and an essential part of the transition to democracy.

Is the government prepared to work with the UN and offer its support for the independent monitoring of human rights in Libya?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really do not know where the NDP lives. The Prime Minister went to the United Nations to work with his allies for post-Libya transition and to help with democracy. The Minister of Foreign Affairs just went to Libya about two weeks ago to promote women's rights. Perhaps the NDP should look at what the record of this government is and then ask some questions that are more relevant.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is a relevant question. The hypocrisy of the government continues. It has—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. Once again I would ask members to hold their applause until the end of the question and not at the beginning.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy of the government continues. It heralds free trade with the European Union and yet is threatening to take the European Union to the WTO to protect big oil companies and the oil sands.

The international community is concerned about the environmental costs of the oil sands. Instead of acting to address this, the Conservatives just keep giving larger and larger subsidies to these highly profitable companies.

How many more black eyes before Conservatives finally wake up and take action on the environment?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed and amazed that the opposition is taking the side of European bureaucrats against the interests of Canadian workers, the Canadian economy and against a key Canadian resource.

The European Commission would unfairly single out the oil sands without taking into account the actual GHG emissions coming from crude oil from countries like Russia, Nigeria and others, which have the same or higher levels—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer clearly shows that the Conservative government does not understand the consequences of its inaction. The Commissioner of the Environment and a number of unions fighting to protect jobs in Alberta have called the government's plan for the oil sands inadequate.

Instead of supporting a pipeline that exports our bitumen and our jobs abroad, why does this government not address international concerns about its management of the oil sands?

[*English*]

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the EU position is unscientific and discriminatory. I have written to the EU Commission for energy and I presented Canada's strong case, as I have with several of my European counterparts.

Furthermore, if it is an objective of the EU to reduce GHG emissions, its position is also illogical since it discriminates against oil it does not import and gives a free pass to oil it does import.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week Libyans cast off more than 40 years of autocratic rule, and much of the success is owed to the women of Libya.

In keeping with this legacy of nation-building and at a recent international conference, Libyan women declared that they wanted to be talked to, not about.

In light of the recent debates about Sharia law and the rights of women, can we count on the government to support the desire of Libyan women to be part of the National Transitional Council and any future Libyan governments in accordance with UN Security Council resolution 1325?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear. As I said before, human rights is the cornerstone of this government's policy, including rights for women. We made that very clear when the Minister of Foreign Affairs was in Libya.

I can assure the member that we will stand up for those rights when we talk to the NTC as it moves ahead post-Gadhafi in building up its new constitution.

* * *

●(1455)

[*Translation*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is about to undermine public safety by getting rid of the gun registry. While the government is rushing to turn its back on its responsibility to protect the safety of Canadians, some provinces seem ready to take on that responsibility.

Will the government help provinces, such as Quebec, that might try to create their own gun control system? Will the government give

them the data already in the registry? Second, will the government allow police across the country to continue consulting the data already in the registry?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have consistently opposed this wasteful, ineffective measure that does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Our government has strongly and consistently opposed the prior Liberal government's \$2 billion boondoggle.

Provincial governments are free to proceed as they wish, but we will not assist in setting up another registry. Records held by the Canadian firearms program will not be shared with the provinces.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Muskoka minister said:

If I was the decision maker, if I had set up a parallel process...and created a situation where the auditor-general did not know...I'd be resigning right now and turning myself into the local police office.

However, the minister managed applications from his constituency office. He evaded the AG and evaded access to information laws.

Will he stand now and take responsibility or is he too busy looking for the address of the Huntsville police department?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts still have not changed. The Auditor General's appearance at committee confirmed that the issue has been totally aired. We have said that we have accepted the Auditor General's recommendation, so I do not know what the problem is.

I will join the Minister of Finance and talk about some good news. The good news is that every dollar was accounted for. All 32 projects came in under budget. The program itself was under-spent.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the spokespeople may change, but the broken record sounds the same.

Oral Questions

● (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

We know that the minister was involved in 32 projects, that he implemented a parallel process that was hidden from the Auditor General and administered from his constituency office, and that he did not submit a single document to the Auditor General even though senior federal officials were at the meetings. After being promised transparency and openness, Canadians are disappointed and for good reason.

When we will have a complete parliamentary investigation to shed some light on all the abuses of ethical and financial trust involved in the G8 funding?

[English]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member. It is the same old story. The facts have not changed. How many times do I have to tell him that the facts have not changed?

The Auditor General has aired this issue thoroughly. What else can I say? He came in front of the committee and said this very clearly. If he were a member of the committee he would have known what the Auditor General said. I will repeat again that the facts have not changed. The answers will remain the same.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in Egypt continues to deteriorate for Coptic Christians. Copts, who make up 10% to 15% of the population in Egypt, are being targeted and persecuted for ethnic and religious reasons by hateful enemies. Countless murders of Copts have been reported in Cairo and across Egypt, and many others are going unreported.

My question is for the minister. What is our government doing to address this unprecedented violence toward the largest religious minority in the region?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Friday, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and I met with some 30 leaders of Canada's Coptic community to express Canada's solidarity with that community, particularly their loved ones in Egypt, to express once more this government's condemnation of the violence, particularly that by apparently members of the Egyptian military two weeks ago killing innocent Coptic civilians.

The Prime Minister led the inclusion of an expression of concern about vulnerable religious minorities in the Arab spring declaration of the G8 at Deauville. We have called upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate the most recent killings. We are creating an office for religious freedom to, in the words of the Prime Minister, make the promotion of religious freedom a key pillar of Canadian foreign policy.

We will always stand in solidarity with those who face this kind of persecution.

● (1500)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been five full months since the terrible flooding in Manitoba and the evacuation of the first nations. The community of Lake St. Martin First Nation is still devastated. There were 727 citizens evacuated, most still occupying rooms spread across six hotels in downtown Winnipeg at a cost of \$1 million per week. Children are not in permanent schools and families with no hope in sight.

Will the minister commit today to rebuild Lake St. Martin First Nation on the higher ground that is right next to that community?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, Lake St. Martin is a very tragic story and we know that the community has been relocated. The children are now getting their schooling and we are working with the Province of Manitoba. I sent a special representative to look into the situation. We will be working with the province and looking at a relocation of the community.

* * *

AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are again planning to dismantle the Avro Arrow, this time in Downsview, Ontario, and literally cutting it apart with torches, just like in 1959.

The Air and Space Museum has been evicted and is on a growing list of our heritage buildings facing the Conservative government's wrecking ball.

Last week, Rob Cohen, the CEO of the museum said, "It is all pass the buck politics". When will the Conservatives stop passing the buck and step in to save this historic museum?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first, even though it is called the Canadian Air and Space Museum, it is, in fact, a private museum and a private collection. The museum had a fundraising campaign but it was not as successful as it had hoped it would be. This was a decision by Downsview.

The museum has not been paying its bills and it has not been paying the taxes, I understand. This was a responsible decision made by Downsview and by the Department of Public Works.

I have asked my department to work with our national museums and to ask the management of that museum what in their collection they would like to save, and to work with the government to make some of the collection available to some of our national museums.

We are showing leadership, both to the museum and to the collection, but also to taxpayers.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about the situation in Pakistan.

Routine Proceedings

While that country was recovering from the 2010 floods, monsoon rains, which began in August, have battered Balochistan and Sindh provinces.

Could the Minister of International Cooperation please inform the House how Canada is responding to pleas for relief?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Yes, Mr. Speaker, Pakistan is once again suffering from a flood this year. Last year, when I visited Sindh province, I saw how floods can devastate families and children.

Canada did its part last year and will do so again with \$11 million this year to help Pakistan.

Canadians know that our government will ensure that victims get the food, clean water and health care they need.

* * *

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian consumers need protection from the predatory practices of the banks and credit card companies.

Excessive interest rates and high ATM fees hit consumers' wallets, while skyrocketing merchant fees make prices higher in Canada than our neighbours to the south. Yet, the Minister of Finance and the approach of the government has little effect.

Will the minister now admit that his approach is not working and agree to pass binding legislation to protect Canadian families as outlined in the NDP motion passed by this House in 2009?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member probably knows, one of the Senate committees has been asked by me, in my capacity as Minister of Finance, to have a look at cross-border pricing.

The committee is already hearing witnesses. I appeared before the committee last week. I look forward to the Senate committee reporting back with the facts. I would be happy to share those facts with the hon. member.

* * *

• (1505)

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, my question today for the Prime Minister is in relation to the fact that in the next few days we will be seeing the Canadian office of the International Association of Firefighters, representing 22,000 Canadian professional firefighters, on Parliament Hill asking us for three specific things.

They are looking for a national public safety officer compensation benefit, for access to vaccines and anti-virals in the case of a flu pandemic and for changes to national building codes to make it safer for them when they do their job.

Will government members commit that we can get this done for our firefighters?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we work very closely with the firefighters on a number of issues and we continue to look forward to working with them.

I might point out the specific example that our government brought in with respect to hazardous materials and the moneys we paid in that respect to help train the trainers. We also brought forward the tax credit for volunteer firefighters, which the opposition parties voted against, which was very unfortunate.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CERTIFICATES OF NOMINATION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 111.1, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a certificate of nomination, with biographical notes, for the proposed appointment of Michael Ferguson as Auditor General of Canada. I request that the nomination be referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

* * *

CANADA PENSION PLAN

Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor, Lib.): moved for leave to introduce Bill C-335, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan (deductions — disabled child).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will briefly describe the intention of this bill. As members know, a lot of amendments are proposed in this House regarding the Canada pension plan, employment insurance, old age security and the like. It is a very complex formula to provide people benefits once they reach 65 years of age or 60 if they choose to do so.

This bill would change the formula slightly to allow people to get credit for the years they were not working because they were looking after a disabled child. The way to do that through the tax system is through tax benefits they receive by looking after a disabled child in the earlier years of life, maybe in their 30s or 40s. We would ensure they would not be penalized for the years they missed, once they apply for their Canada pension plan at age 65. I think that would be a small change in the formula but the principle is sound, it is beneficial for them and substantial for people who are unable to work because, unfortunately, they must look after a child who is disabled.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

EGYPT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the consultation continues but I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following. I move:

Routine Proceedings

That a take note debate on the subject of the ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, and their institutions, pursuant to Standing Order 53.1 take place on Thursday, October 27, and;

notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practices of the House, when the House begins the said proceedings, no quorum calls, requests for unanimous consent or dilatory motions shall be received by the Speaker and; any member rising to speak during debate may indicate to the Speaker that he or she will be dividing his or her time with another member.

• (1510)

The Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people all over Ontario who are concerned about the proposed mega-quarry, in Melancthon township in Dufferin county, which is approximately 2,300 acres.

The petitioners are concerned by a number of things, one of which is that the proposed mega-quarry would remove from production some of Ontario's best farmland. They are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the proposed Highland Companies' mega-quarry development.

RAILWAY SAFETY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition calling on the government to amend the Railway Safety Act to require that areas with high pedestrian volume, where trains are known to dim or extinguish their headlights, be fitted with large street lamps, powered by solar energy and operated by motion detector.

This petition is in response to a terrible accident that took place almost a year ago in Montreal around the tracks under the Turcot exchange where, unfortunately, three wonderful, talented young men were killed and two, fortunately, escaped. Apparently the lights were dimmed at that time.

There needs to be a way to ensure these areas are properly lit when a train is on its way so that, if there are people in the vicinity, they will be alerted to the fact that danger is coming.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from all across Canada who call upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. They point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other occupational and industrial causes combined

and yet Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world.

The petitioners also point out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use. Therefore, they call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live, to end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam convention.

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to present a petition signed by many western Canadian grain and barley farmers, the very farmers to whom the government is currently refusing to listen. They are concerned with the government's ideological plan to kill the Canadian Wheat Board without first holding a plebiscite of its membership as it is required to do by section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

Western Canadian farmers' livelihoods are at risk should they lose the clout of the Canadian Wheat Board to set the best price for their grain, negotiate fair treatment and prices from the railways, and lower transportation costs among the many services it provides.

The petitioners demand that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food honour their wishes as expressed democratically through a plebiscite. As members know, the government failed to hold a plebiscite. As a result, the farmers held their own plebiscite and a full 62% of wheat farmers and 51% of barley farmers asked that the government maintain the single-desk system. This petition asks the government to honour their wishes.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of my constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country to table a petition asking the Government of Canada to publicly condemn the Chinese communist regime's illegal persecution of the practitioners of Falun Gong and help rescue the listed family members of Canadians who are incarcerated in China simply for their belief in the Falun Gong faith.

• (1515)

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition with regard to the Canadian Wheat Board.

The livelihoods of western Canadian farmers are at risk should they lose the clout of the Canadian Wheat board to set the best price for their grain, negotiate fair treatment from the railways, lower transportation costs, and lose the many other services it provides.

Speaker's Ruling

The petitioners demand that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food honour their wishes as expressed democratically through a plebiscite. These wonderful prairie individuals want the government to listen to what the prairie farmers actually want.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The Chair has notice of a request for an emergency debate from the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt, however, the House has granted consent for a take note debate on the subject on Thursday.

The member for Scarborough—Agincourt is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. There was some confusion as to the date that the emergency take note debate would take place. Last week the House unanimously agreed that we needed to move on the issue and the government was given marching orders, yet last weekend there was a disagreement as to when the debate would be held. There was a general consensus that the debate would take place on Monday. However, now it is to take place on Thursday.

Mr. Speaker, I withdraw my request. However, I want the House to know that we are ready for the debate to take place tonight and unfortunately the government is not.

The Speaker: There is no need to engage in debate on this. The House did not grant unanimous consent last week for a take note debate to take place tonight. However, it did grant consent today for that to take place on Thursday. It is a simple matter in the eyes of the chair.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Speaker, there was consent and the parties talked about the debate taking place Monday night. Perhaps you were not privy to that information but there are members who were.

The Speaker: The Chair can only comment on things that happen within the chamber in these types of instances.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ADMISSIBILITY OF BILL C-18—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on October 18, 2011 by the member for Malpeque concerning the admissibility of Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the member for having raised this matter, as well as the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, the Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, the Parliamentary

Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House, and the members for Guelph and Winnipeg North for their interventions.

[*English*]

In raising his question of privilege, the member for Malpeque stated that the government had violated a provision of an existing statute by having introduced Bill C-18 without having previously allowed grain producers to vote on any changes to the structure and mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board as is required in section 47.1 of the existing Canadian Wheat Board Act.

In doing so, he claimed:

...my privileges have been violated due to the expectation that I will be required to engage in and cast a vote upon legislation that begins from the premise of a deliberate and overt violation of statutes passed by the House with the expectation that those provisions would be respected most of all by members of the House.

[*Translation*]

The member for Malpeque explained that he was not asking the Speaker to rule on the legality of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, but rather whether his privileges were violated as a result of the government introducing legislation he claimed contravened an existing statute passed by Parliament.

The government House leader countered that the Chair was in fact being asked to make a ruling on a matter of law by interpreting provisions of a statute, despite the well-established practice that it is not for the Chair to rule on legal or constitutional matters.

[*English*]

He also challenged the member for Malpeque's contention that section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act rendered the consideration of Bill C-18 unlawful, arguing that such an interpretation was tantamount to asserting that the enactment of a statute could fetter the House's consideration of future legislation.

He suggested it:

...would result in a delegation of the ability of this Parliament to make decisions to individuals outside of...Parliament, effectively giving them the power to legislate the law of this land rather than Parliament—

He emphasized that Parliament is free to consider whatever legislation it sees fit, including legislation to amend existing statutes.

In addressing this very point, Peter Hogg's *Constitutional Law of Canada*, Fifth Edition, Volume 1, on page 352, notes:

Not only may the Parliament or a Legislature, acting within its allotted sphere of competence, make any law it chooses, it may repeal any of its earlier laws. Even if the Parliament or Legislature purported to provide that a particular law was not to be repealed or altered, this provision would not be effective to prevent a future Parliament or Legislature from repealing or amending the "protected" law.

This citation rightfully underscores Parliament's continued right to legislate.

•(1520)

[*Translation*]

The government House leader also spoke to the role of the Speaker in preparing rulings, and quoted from *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, Second Edition, at page 261. For the benefit of the House, I would like to cite the full passage, which reads:

Government Orders

Finally, while Speakers must take the Constitution and statutes into account when preparing a ruling, numerous Speakers have explained that it is not up to the Speaker to rule on the “constitutionality” or “legality” of measures before the House.

[*English*]

The footnote to this citation, footnote 75 on page 261, refers to an April 9, 1991 ruling by Speaker Fraser at pages 19233 and 19234 of *Debates*, in which the Speaker ruled that the Chair must avoid interpreting, even indirectly, the Constitution, or a statute. This is a well-entrenched practice that remains in force today and to which I alluded when this matter was first raised on October 18, 2011.

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, it is important to delineate clearly between interpreting legal provisions of statutes—which is not within the purview of the Chair—and ensuring the soundness of the procedures and practices of the House when considering legislation—which, of course, is the role of the Chair.

[*English*]

The hon. member for Malpeque has offered the House his interpretation of a law, in this case section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. He has concluded that the government has not respected its provisions and is therefore precluded from proceeding with Bill C-18. For my part, like my predecessors, when faced with similar situations, I must decline to follow the hon. member's example. It is not for the Chair to interpret the meaning of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. I have confined my review of the matter to its purely procedural aspects.

Having carefully reviewed the submissions on this matter, I must conclude that, while the member for Malpeque may feel aggrieved by the government's approach and by its introduction of Bill C-18, there has been no evidence offered that the government's actions in this case have in any way undermined the ability of the member to fulfill his parliamentary functions.

Therefore, the Chair cannot find that either the introduction of Bill C-18 or the fact that members are being asked to consider the bill constitutes a *prima facie* question of privilege.

[*Translation*]

I thank all members for their attention.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

MARKETING FREEDOM FOR GRAIN FARMERS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, an Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee, of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to Bill C-18. However, I am disheartened by the method the government is using to kill the Canadian Wheat Board and deny farmers their legitimate say in the process. This

attack on a Canadian institution that was placed under farmer control in 1997 I believe is unprecedented in Canadian history.

We see many countries around the world moving to democracy, some as a result of support received from the Canadian military, yet here at home we see the very principle of democracy being taken away under the iron fist of this regime. The government is violating a law passed in Parliament. It is denying farmers the right to a vote that was established in law at one point in time as well as eliminating the ability to use access to information a little further down the road. Also, the minister, and his parliamentary secretary specifically, have violated their oaths of office. As well, there has been an unbelievable amount of misinformation and propaganda about the Canadian Wheat Board and its farmer-elected directors by this particular regime.

For quite a while we have seen this taking place by the government. Since it came into power in 2006, it has set out on a concerted attack against the board.

It fired directors who were appointed by the previous government specifically to further the efforts of primary producers around the world. They were experts in international law and marketing. They were replaced by government toadies whose objective in life was to destroy the board while working within it.

Against the wishes of the Canadian Wheat Board's elected board of directors, the government fired its former CEO, Adrian Meisner, who was working on the farmers' behalf. It put a gag order on the Wheat Board.

When farmers were to elect directors to the Wheat Board's board of directors, in every election the constituency offices of government members were used to spread propaganda against the Wheat Board in an effort to have anti-board directors elected. This failed every time because eight out of ten of the directors were in fact pro board.

If this was happening anywhere else in the world, some would suggest that we send in the military. That is how I feel about it.

These actions go well beyond the Wheat Board. Canadians should be concerned. This has happened to one law in one institution using the methods by which the government operates. However, the denial of legitimate rights to one group is an infringement on the rights of all.

I just cannot imagine how backbenchers in that party can sit there and not speak up. I asked a question of the member for Crowfoot earlier today as to why he does not quote those who are opposed to what the government is doing. We are receiving many calls from producers who tell us that the response they have received from Conservative members is that there is a difference in ideology and that they do not want to talk to them. Elected members of Parliament have a responsibility to all constituents, not just to the Prime Minister who seems to be their boss and is destroying the Canadian Wheat Board based on ideology.

In this instance, we are talking about orderly marketing. The same principles that allow for orderly marketing, i.e., through the Canadian Wheat Board's function, make supply management possible.

Government Orders

● (1525)

The same principles that allow single desk marketing to function on the Prairies are the same principles that apply in terms of maple syrup and beef in the province of Quebec. A similar principle applies to collective bargaining for unions.

In this case, the government is denying the rights of the majority, as was clearly spelled out in the vote that was held by the Canadian Wheat Board itself. Eight out of ten of the farm-elected directors oppose what the government is doing and 62% of producers oppose what the government is doing. What I find amazing is that others, like supply management groups, fail to speak out in the Wheat Board's defence.

I am going to ask this very directly. Is it the fear of the jackboots approval of the government that makes others voiceless in this country? Is it the fear that if supply management speaks out against what the government is doing to the Canadian Wheat Board, it will feel the wrath of the government? Where is the farm leadership in terms of support of the Wheat Board? Supply management tells us privately that it supports orderly marketing and opposes what the government is doing, but it fails to speak out.

My question to the backbenchers over there is this. When they have an issue or a law that they are concerned about, who will stand up for them when their time comes and the government, based on ideology, wants to target them rather than somebody else?

The minister in this case is selling out to United States grain interests. What is he doing? What is the minister actually doing for Canadian farmers? Let us again look specifically at the bill. Bill C-18 begins from the premise of denying farmers their legal right to determine their own future. If the government believed it had the support of the majority of farmers, a plebiscite would have been held under section 47.1, as the legislation demands.

Who is the Minister of Agriculture really working for? Bear in mind that United States grain interests have accused the Canadian Wheat Board under United States and international trade laws of trading unfairly on 14 different occasions. The United States has lost every time. I submit that the Minister of Agriculture is serving up the Canadian Wheat Board to those United States interests on a silver platter.

An economist working with the office of the chief economist of the U.S. department of agriculture, with regard to the United States' efforts to challenge the Wheat Board, stated the following:

The U.S. wheat industry has persistently claimed that the CWB is able to undercut commercially offered export prices in select markets or sell higher-quality wheat at discounted prices, but can offer only limited anecdotal evidence to support those claims.

In fact, it has no claims.

The Canadian Wheat Board sells as a single desk seller and prevents the deterioration of the lowest sellers setting the price and through the Canadian Wheat Board, it is the highest seller, maximizing returns in the marketplace back to primary producers. The Canadian Wheat Board has shown that time and time again, but the minister is selling out to United States interests and farmers will be the losers.

In a May 26, 2011 statement supporting the elimination of the CWB, the United States wheat associates acknowledged the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board could, "initially mean more Canadian wheat moving to parts of the United States... However, the huge price incentive that currently drives that desire would dissipate very quickly". The president of the United States wheat associates had this to say on an earlier occasion on the elimination of the Canadian Wheat Board, "There could be opportunities created for U.S. farmers to access markets in Canada and we can access the transportation systems as well".

Further, a study prepared for United States Senator Kent Conrad stated, "If the CWB's single desk authority is eliminated...the United States may become more competitive in offshore markets.

● (1530)

That same report also found that by eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board:

The U.S. and Canadian markets would become more integrated without the CWB. It would be possible for multinational grain companies to buy wheat in Canada and export it from U.S. ports.

The bottom line is, clearly, this is a bill that would give advantages to American producers, takes advantages away from Canadian producers, gives advantages to the multinational grain trade, and Canadian farmers would be the losers. The government is doing that, imposing that on Canadian farmers without allowing farmers their right to vote under the law.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has made a lot about the vote that was taken, or plebiscite, I should say, by the Wheat Board. Even the Wheat Board itself admits that this should not be taken as representative of all farmers. Many farmers in my riding did not receive a ballot. This vote was not a legitimate vote.

In fact, this weekend, we took a straw poll in my riding of 20 farmers. We did not select these farmers. This was a random sample.

I wonder if the member would comment on the fact that not one of those farmers wanted to maintain the status quo. Every one of the 20 who were called wanted to have choice. That is what is happening on the ground.

That vote was not representative because many farmers did not receive a ballot who should have received a ballot.

● (1535)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. If the member really believes what he is getting in his straw polls, then why does this law and order party not abide by the laws that are on the books?

I find it amazing that the Minister of Agriculture and several colleagues, obviously with speaking notes from the PMO, stood and talked about the fact that the Canadian Wheat Board was designed in 1943 and that there have been no changes since.

Government Orders

Yes, there were. In 1997, the board was changed to include 10 farmer elected directors, time at a time, and by the way it includes the director in the parliamentary secretary's riding who is pro-board. They win 8 out of 10 every time. That is 80%.

The minister has the right under the act, has the responsibility under the act, to hold a vote, and the government fails to do it.

If they are people of their convictions, then allow that vote to be held and let us see where the chips fall. We will support what producers want, if it is done by way of a legal plebiscite.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have read in *The Economist* statements that have been made about the deterioration of small farms in western Canada, along with it the deterioration of small economies in smaller towns and villages in western Canada.

Then we read in *The Wall Street Journal* how it is heralding the opportunities that dismantling Wheat Board would give large Canadian and international grain companies which would now be sucking the profits out of farmers out west and keeping them for themselves and their shareholders.

I wonder if the member for Malpeque would express any concern he might have for western Canadian small farms and communities.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there is no question that there is a concern for western farmers, western wheat and barley growers, as a result of this particular legislation.

There have been statements after statements made by grain companies, by directors of grain companies, and Viterra believes its shares are going to go up. The U. S. wheat associates is very pleased with what is happening. This is going to be a gain-gain for the grain multinationals of the world.

The Canadian Wheat Board has been the vehicle that has been willing to challenge the railways. It has been able to glean money back from the railways that goes back to primary producers. Who is going to stand up for producers against the railways when the Wheat Board is gone? It has the economic power to stand up against them. The winners will be the railways. I maintain we will see loss of producer cars and short line railways over four or five years. The international grain corporate sector is going to be gaining and the losses are going to be the primary producers.

Just who is the minister working for?

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to speak to the changes that we are making to the marketing of wheat and barley in western Canada.

The member for Malpeque, who just spoke, has had the opportunity his entire farming career to market outside of the Canadian Wheat Board because of his location in this country. Unfortunately, my constituents and my family have never had the opportunity to capitalize on market situations not only domestically but around the world and take advantage of those opportunities and put those dollars directly into their own pockets.

This has been an extremely divisive issue in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake, and a lot of that is because of the fear and smear that has been spread by the opposition and by the Wheat Board directors themselves. It is really unfortunate because we market all

sorts of other crops, like oil seeds, and we do not have these types of divisive debates over whether or not farmers have the right to sell their own products.

It is completely unacceptable that in a democracy individuals in a certain region of Canada do not have property rights over their own personal property, that they are subjected to an organization that has been empowered by the Government of Canada to take away their production and market it for them, whether they like it or not.

I have many friends who are farmers. I am a farmer myself, although I have never been a wheat farmer, and I put that out there right now. I am a cattle producer. However, my family does grow wheat and barley and other commodities.

This has been a divisive issue. I have said throughout this whole debate that some of my friends support the monopoly at the Wheat Board and some are against it. On this issue, I stand with my friends. What I mean by that is that farmers on both sides of this issue have things that are important to them from a personal perspective.

I have talked to farmers over the last several years since I have been a member of Parliament and before that when I was in farm politics for several years. I have always made the point that the Wheat Board, in its new format, has to be there for those producers who still want to collectively market their product, who want to pool their resources. This legislation would do just that.

My father and my brother are farmers. They are organic producers. Because they grow organic crops, the Wheat Board has never been a viable option for them to truly capitalize on the market opportunities that exist in the organic industry. They can sell directly their oats, their flax, their organic canola, but when it comes to wheat, they have to sell it through the Wheat Board. So, for years my father and my brother have not grown organic wheat because the premiums in the marketplace are removed from them and subjected to the pool, so they can never profit from it.

However, there is the buyback option. The member for Malpeque is going to jump in and say they can buy it back. They can buy it back at the price being offered in the marketplace. They sell it at a commodity price to the Wheat Board and then buy it back at the premium value as an organic commodity. There is absolutely no advantage of being able to move that market directly to the consumer. It is wrong.

This legislation would provide those producers in my riding and across western Canada who want to be involved in the Canadian Wheat Board with a great opportunity. The government is still going to support the new voluntary Wheat Board. The government is going to underwrite the pool accounts. The government is still going to help set initial prices. The Canadian Wheat Board fund is going to be moved over into the new voluntary Canadian Wheat Board.

The producer cars that the Wheat Board always took credit for are still going to remain with the Canadian Grain Commission. It will ensure that producer cars are available to farmers who want to ship directly.

Government Orders

I am a huge fan of the Port of Churchill. Our government is going to ensure that the Port of Churchill receives up to \$5 million per year over the next five years to help it deal with any losses it may incur if there is a reduction in the volume of wheat and barley shipped through the port. More important, the Port of Churchill's future is going to depend upon the voluntary Canadian Wheat Board making use of that port and opening up new railway opportunities, such as the Hudson Bay rail line in northern Saskatchewan that CN Rail is now abandoning.

• (1540)

That line has been out of service for about 20 years and unfortunately it has not moved grain from northern Saskatchewan through the Wheat Board position at Port of Churchill. That in itself is a savings of \$7 per tonne in shipment for each and every farmer in northern Saskatchewan if they can capitalize through the Wheat Board on making use of the Port of Churchill.

My colleague from Yorkton—Melville just made this point about the Wheat Board plebiscite. The question on that plebiscite is whether every producer had the right to exercise a vote in that plebiscite. So many producers over the last 10 years have walked away from the Wheat Board and have grown alternative commodities so they do not have to deal with the Wheat Board. Those farmers were never given an opportunity to vote.

The other thing that is really skewed in the whole process is that we never had all the opportunities or all possibilities on the ballot. It said “Do you support the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board, yes or no?” It never mentioned “Do you support a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board?” If we talked to most of those producers who supported the Canadian Wheat Board on that plebiscite question, most would say that they would support a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board, especially one that has the built-in safety net that we are providing from the Government of Canada.

We do not have a clear question. We do not know who really had a chance to vote. Not everyone had an opportunity in the agriculture industry to vote in the plebiscite. We know in the fundamentals of democracy the one thing true in the House of Commons is that we respect the minority position. Because we won government, we do not make every Canadian and every member in the House of Commons become a Conservative. We do not do that because we need to have a robust opposition. However, under the Wheat Board plebiscite, it is all or nothing according to the board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. This means that farmer whether they support the Wheat Board or not have to become a component of the Wheat Board monopoly, or some people might say dictatorship. That is not the right way to do business.

Aside from respecting the minority position of farmers in western Canada, there is the whole issue of respect for personal property rights. That is a key fundamental value of any democracy anywhere in the world.

Aside from questions around the plebiscite, the questions around whether producers want or do not want a monopoly or a volunteer Wheat Board, we have to look at this from the whole aspect of agronomics, the dollars, the opportunities and the increased value of products that can be produced in the prairie region. Farmers are finally allowed to make true market-based decisions on what they

can find in the marketplace. Under the bill, they would have the opportunity to be free to contract directly with buyers, processors and grow the exact varieties that they need. I hear from maltsters and millers that they would love to contract directly with farmers to grow certain varieties. Through the Wheat Board process that is extremely limited.

This will also engage farmers who have opted out of the monopoly of the Wheat Board to now re-enter the marketplace because they have the freedom and the ability to market and risk manage their own commodities. They do it already with oilseeds, with coarse grains, with pulse and other specialty crops. Now they can take that expertise and apply it to growing and marketing wheat and barley for export. They can contract specific varieties or contract specific months of delivery, pricing options, bases options with various companies out there.

This will provide more value-added activity. We are already seeing that with the announcement of the new durum milling plant in Regina. We have already experienced this my home province of Manitoba when we took oats outside of the Wheat Board. Can-Oat Milling setup and developed a great new mill. It has increased the number of acres of oats grown in Manitoba by over 250,000 acres. This is just one plant having that type of impact in one province.

• (1545)

The agronomics is great. It is good for crop rotation and people can make better decisions that way.

This has been a divisive issue, but all the farmers out there, their friends and neighbours do not have these types of battles over their other commodities. At the end of the day, they will still be friends and neighbours with a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1550)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the idea that the voluntary Wheat Board could operate is nothing but government hypocrisy. The fact is the board is moving. The government, through this bill, would fire the farmer-elected directors, who were elected by the farm community, and it would either appoint or leave in place its appointed toadies from the last board, one of which the agriculture committee had said was not qualified to do the job.

The member talks about the Wheat Board. The Wheat Board has asked for several things and I would ask the member if the government is willing to provide them all. It has asked for \$225 million in capital to finance grain inventories, financing and borrowing guarantees, \$200 million to fund a risk reserve to backstop cooling, guaranteed access to elevators and port facilities and regulated authority to direct farmers' grain to the right port. That is what the elected board of directors has asked for and the government is only providing guarantees.

Why has the government chosen, once again, to ignore what the elected board of directors of the Canadian Wheat Board is saying is required for this voluntary board to work? Is it just a farce, or what?

Government Orders

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, the member for Malpeque is the biggest naysayer and cheerleader for complete defeatism in western Canada. I cannot believe the rhetoric that he continues to spew.

If we can believe the plebiscite and 62% of producers believe in the Canadian Wheat Board, then which organization would not want to stand and say that it would go out there, work with them and sell their wheat and barley? Sixty-two per cent of the people endorse the idea of collectively pooling resources and moving ahead. Therefore, there is a great opportunity out there for a voluntary Wheat Board. There is a basis of where we could start from and build upon. There is an opportunity for it to prove to those who do not support the Canadian Wheat Board that it can do the job.

There will be opportunities for the Canadian Wheat Board to sign shipper deals with railways, to sign deliveries through different elevator terminals. Most of the elevator terminals we have in western Canada are proud, Canadian-owned entities. Those terminals do not want to give up on the marketing of the Wheat Board through their facilities. They want those elevation tariffs. They want to be able to work with their local producers because those producers deliver wheat as well as other commodities. They would have an obligation and responsibility to work with the local farmers and a new voluntary Wheat Board to get the job done.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I had an exchange with the hon. member for Peace River and I have gone back to check that indeed the Wheat Board will allow for sales of organic wheat. I agree the Wheat Board will not go out of its way to help farmers sell organic wheat, but it is possible to do a single contract. The buyback paperwork is a bit of a hassle, but they are able to sell organic wheat at a premium price.

How does the hon. member distinguish how we treat western farmers from what happened to the Ontario Wheat Producers Marketing Board, also started back in the 1950s? There was a plebiscite and a two-thirds majority vote of those Ontario wheat farmers is why they are not covered by a marketing board. Why is the government applying a different standard to the western Canadian hard wheat farmers?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I can tell members that our personal experience on my family farm is that the Wheat Board is extremely oppressive when it comes down to dealing with it with organic wheat. We do not get the premium because of the buyback, the paperwork and the associated costs. Even though the wheat never leaves the producers' yard, it is still stuck in their bins. They still have to pay the transportation costs as if it is going to port position. Those are dollars the producers lose automatically even though we will have contracts with millers and organic food processors who are actually FOB in the yard. They are paying the trucking costs, not my dad, my brother or other organic farmers. That is why there is such a discrepancy and why producers in the organic industry do not appreciate Canadian Wheat Board one way or the other.

•(1555)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been listening to the debate for several days and there is really nothing new coming up here. I am going to speak primarily for those who are watching via television because some of the discussion here may not be relevant to them and they may not understand it. I am going to start by relating a couple of stories.

A young farmer in my area grew some high quality wheat. It was over 13.5% protein. Wheat of course is the main ingredient in bread and pasta and wheat ground into flour is part of the diet of many people around the world. This farmer wanted to get as high a return as possible for his grain. Like many entrepreneurs, he went to the Internet and he found a flour mill in Ontario that wanted his excellent high quality wheat.

Farmers go to great lengths to maximize the quality of their product and, in this case, producing high protein wheat that lends itself well to making good quality bread. The higher the protein content, the better bread it makes.

The farmer made all the arrangements to deliver his wheat to the mill in Ontario, which really wanted his grain. Somehow the Canadian Wheat Board heard about it and put a stop to the transaction. This cost the farmer dearly and impacted hugely on his operation. He was then forced to sell this wheat to the only entity that was allowed to buy it, the Canadian Wheat Board.

That is a very fundamental violation of property rights. He does not own his own wheat. He can buy it back from the Canadian Wheat Board and then sell it to the flour mill in Ontario, but he has to accept the price that the Wheat Board sets. He also has to pay the freight from his farm all the way to Thunder Bay, Ontario, before he can take legal ownership of a product which he took all the risk and cost of growing.

He has to pay those transportation costs although he does not incur them and he has to accept the price of the Canadian Wheat Board. Those transportation costs are the highest costs per acre that a farmer incurs and he has absolutely no control over that cost. A farmer has to pay the railroad costs even though he or she does not use it if the product is marketed through the Canadian Wheat Board. The farmer has no choice. I want viewers who are watching this to be aware of that. It is unbelievable but it is true. Guess why this farmer wants marketing freedom?

Let me tell people another true story to illustrate why farmers need choice. This story comes from Manitoba and again it involves a young farmer who grew wheat for sale on his farm. Due to some adverse weather conditions, a little too much moisture possibly and other conditions, a fungus invaded his crop and he produced a small percentage of black kernels, which made wheat of a lower quality. The Canadian Wheat Board refused to buy it.

Out of desperation, this farmer sought and found a buyer in the U.S. that wanted his wheat. He loaded up the grain and began hauling it to this market. When stopped at the border and asked what he was doing, he explained the situation. He said because he could not sell his grain in Canada, he would go broke. He was told by Canadian authorities, not U.S. authorities, that he could not do that.

Government Orders

The iron curtain for prairie wheat farmers came down hard. This iron curtain surrounds the farmers of the Prairies. It does not allow them to send their bread wheat to Vancouver, to Ontario or to the U.S.

The young farmer, who had grain the Wheat Board refused to buy, was sent to prison. He was literally put into leg irons and chains. He was strip searched. He was humiliated beyond belief in front of his wife and children. He was made an example of by the authorities so no one else would attempt to sell their wheat.

I invite people to read the story of this young farmer. I farmed in partnership with my brother. This story just tore at my heartstrings. This young farmer's entire operation was completely destroyed because it depended on the sale of that wheat.

•(1600)

Canadians might find that hard to believe, but it happened in Canada, and it is still happening today.

I have a farmer in my area who has a large quantity of wheat. The Wheat Board refuses to buy it. He cannot sell it. The iron curtain that prevents this farmer from having marketing choice, from owning his own product and having the rights other Canadians enjoy, has come down on him as well.

We can have a strong Canadian Wheat Board. This debate has often been twisted to mean that we are out to destroy the board. No. If the board wishes, it could become a very strong board, in my opinion. This debate is about giving farmers a choice. The Wheat Board, if it wishes to remain a co-operative for those farmers who want to use its services, could expand, and it might include all kinds of other commodities. I can see huge potential for it. It could be a very strong marketing agency.

Let us remember that the Wheat Board is using farmers' money to protect its monopoly. It is courting opposition MPs, portraying this issue to them as a threat to dairy farmers, as we just heard, and as a threat to egg producers and chicken and turkey ranchers and to other industries. This is pure baloney sausage—BS, for short. There is absolutely no connection between the two.

It has been portrayed as a takeover by large corporations. If people are speaking to someone who does know what we are talking about and does not understand agriculture today, they can use that line. However, farmers do not just grow the one crop, wheat. There are many other non-board crops that are sold to private companies, and they would be sold in exactly the same way. Canola is a good example.

I have also heard the argument that this is going to hurt family farms. If we scratch below the surface on that issue, how will giving farmers a choice change that? Again, it is a completely bogus argument. It is pure baloney sausage. Wheat producers who follow worldwide commodity prices could sometimes get from \$1 to \$2 per bushel for their bread wheat. That could mean the difference between running a profit or a loss.

Another aspect of the board that many do not realize is that because of the structure of the pooling system, farmers who are part of it, meaning that everybody gets the same price, often have to wait a year or a year and a half for their final payment. In the meantime,

these farmers incur huge costs for raising their crop, including fertilizer, fuel, various chemicals, transportation, machinery costs and repairs. Farmers need that cash flow, yet they are forced to wait. It just does not make sense.

Some time ago I used an illustration, and I will bring it up again at this point. It just shows how unfair this is. I am going to propose a new kind of board, and people can think about it in the context of what we are doing. I would like to propose a board for those who are defending the system. Under this board, which I will call a "lawyer board", the rules and the principles would be the same as what farmers have to follow under the Wheat Board. This board would only apply to lawyers in Quebec and Ontario, and they could not deal directly with their clients, who would have to deal only with those lawyers whom the board said they could deal with. They would not be able to charge fees on how hard they work or the quality of the job; they would all be paid the same as every other lawyer.

When I proposed this idea some time ago, people over on the other side began to be livid. They were angry. If they had to wait a year for some of their revenue or their final payment, they would be extremely upset. In fact, we could try this with some other things. It shows how blatantly unfair it is to deny farmers their property rights.

We do not need more of this iron curtain stuff; we need to bring down the iron curtain that separates prairie farmers and barley producers from the freedom other Canadians enjoy.

•(1605)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the member talks about baloney sausage, he makes it sound as though it is just the opposition or just a few board members who are opposed to the dismantling of the single desk system. In fact, there are protests over the demise of the board going on across our western provinces now; they started on Friday and they are continuing this week.

The member only need look at *The Economist* or *The Wall Street Journal*. They speak of the profits that large Canadian grain companies are going to suddenly make, and they are not going to make those profits because they are going to sell the wheat for more; they are going to make them because they will be taking the profits from the farmers. In fact, Viterra's shares spiked when Canadians found out that the Wheat Board would be gone shortly. Alliance Grain Traders is suddenly going to open up a pasta-making plant. Why? I propose it is because it knows it will get its grain for a cheaper price.

I ask this simple question: why does the hon. member not look at those facts, instead of the ideology that he is basing his decision on?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, this is an example of what I was talking about. There is no focus on property rights. There is no focus on the rights of individual farmers to control their product and market it as they wish. This is a bogus argument.

Government Orders

How is wheat different from canola? The member did not address that, nor has any other member on that side indicated how farmers' marketing of wheat would be different from that of canola. I submit that there is very little difference.

These grain companies enjoy marketing canola, and the majority of farmers would not want to go back to a Wheat Board situation in which canola would be controlled in the same way. I think that is one of the best arguments to indicate that what the member is saying is bogus.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his speech and his long-time effort to free western Canadian wheat growers from the shackles of their mandatory requirement to sell through the Canadian Wheat Board.

The hon. member just mentioned that there is not much of a difference between canola and wheat. I would assert that there is a difference currently for western Canadian grain farmers. Western Canadian grain farmers currently get the world price for canola. That is the product they are marketing themselves through enterprises that they choose. On the flip side, they do not get the world price for wheat: they get less.

I am curious if the hon. member could tell me why it is that intelligent, strong, business-minded farmers are able to get the world price for canola, which they sell in the free market, but are not able to get the world price for the wheat produced on the same farms as their canola.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I apologize if the message came out differently from what I intended. I wanted to explain to everyone that the marketing of wheat would be no different than the marketing of canola once we give farmers a choice. That is what I was trying to indicate, and I appreciate the clarification. These farmers would have the same choice with wheat as they now have with canola, and they would be able to reap the world price for their product.

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition parties pretend that they oppose marketing freedom because they are defending democracy or something. However, when the Liberal government passed legislation allowing same-sex marriage without a referendum, they said it was on the correct principle of our democracy being founded on the principle of protecting minorities against the majority. When the NDP was asked why the postal union did not allow members to vote on the strike or the negotiations, NDP members said it was on the correct principle that we elect representatives to deliberate on our behalf and that not holding a referendum does not contradict democracy.

Can the hon. member explain how the proposed legislation is the fairest, most just way to allow each and every farmer not only to vote for their preference, but to get what they vote for regardless of whether they vote in favour of or against co-operation, regardless of what their neighbour votes for?

• (1610)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Yorkton—Melville may give a short answer, please.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give a short answer.

I think the member makes a very good point. It is self-evident, and I do not think I need to comment more on it. It is obvious that with choice, these things will happen.

One thing I have not heard many people mention is that the board is supposed to report to the agriculture minister on a regular basis and that it has to answer his questions. This has not happened once. It has not reported to him. He has sought information on its marketing practices, the prices that farmers are getting and so on. If it did not have anything to hide, it would be willing to report to our minister.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

The minister made that comment the other day. The Wheat Board reports in an annual report every year. The board has said itself that it has reported.

Why does that member, his minister and the parliamentary secretary continue to provide misinformation to this House and Canadians?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, that is not what I was talking about. I was saying that the minister has asked the board questions about its pricing practices, and the board does not answer.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is hard to know how to use the 10 minutes allocated for this stage of the debate, but let me begin by saying there are many times in the House of Commons when reasonable people can reasonably disagree, and this is one of them. This is one of those cases where the farming community is divided. We do not know if it is 60:40 or 40:60 because there has not been, by the government's accounting, a fair test of the actual will of the people.

What we do know is that there has been no empirical evidence whatsoever presented by the government to convince our side of the argument, which I argue is a perfectly legitimate point of view. The government has not presented any paperwork, documentation or business case as to why or if farmers will be better off. It tells us over and over again that farmers will be better off, but it is anecdotal. It is much like my colleague just said. He did a straw poll of 20 farmers in his riding and all 20 of them said they wanted to get rid of the Wheat Board. That is not very scientific when there are some 75,000 prairie farmers producing grain. We do not have the tools we need to do our job. If we are going to have a reasonable debate, we would all benefit from the same base level of information.

We have empirical evidence. We have 75 years of evidence that says the Canadian Wheat Board has served farmers well and provided the best possible price at the minimum possible risk for farmers in an inherently unstable industry. We have asked the government to produce something, anything, to support its contention. In the absence of any documentation, business plan or cost benefit analysis, we can only assume that no such documentation exists. This leads me to the conclusion that it is a reckless and irresponsible action on the part of government to undertake such a comprehensive change in the way the rural prairie farm economy does business without so much as a business plan.

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The government accuses us of all kinds of things, but nobody in his or her right mind would dismantle a successful \$6 billion a year corporation without an impact study, a business plan and some justification and documentation as to why and if it will be better. We have heard nothing. To add insult to injury, not only has there been no evidence, no documentation and no proof, other than the notion and the whim of some self-interested Conservative members of Parliament who in fact farm grain themselves and who, I will argue later in my speech, are in a direct conflict of interest, now the Conservatives have even shut down debate. They have moved closure so that we will not be able to do our due diligence.

It is our job as members of Parliament to analyze, assess and test the merits of legislation put before us with reasoned debate, but we are not going to have that opportunity. A lot of people do not realize that the Conservatives pulled a fast one regarding the committee. Instead of sending the bill to the agriculture committee or even the international trade committee, they are sending it to a special legislative committee, which, by some happy coincidence, is not allowed to bring in witnesses other than technical witnesses to talk about the technical details of the bill.

Nowhere in the study at the committee stage will farmers be brought in to discuss the merits of the bill. The committee will only be able to discuss what various sections of the legislation actually do. That does not help members with hearing witnesses about whether or not they like using the Canadian Wheat Board. At no point in this process will we be discussing the merits of this sweeping, profound and permanent change the legislation contemplates in the way prairie farmers market their grain.

I have some quotes which I think members will find interesting. It seems almost everybody, except the Conservatives present, recognizes that the Canadian Wheat Board has been a net advantage to prairie farmers.

• (1615)

Robert Carlson, president of the North Dakota Farmers Union, said that he is convinced the Wheat Board earned Canadian farmers big premiums compared to U.S. prices and that the end of the monopoly will further weaken North American farmers and give more control to the giant multinationals. He said that it has been consistently true that the Canadian Wheat Board has earned more money for Canadian farmers.

Americans have been aware that the Wheat Board is an advantage for years. That is why they filed 13 separate trade complaints at the GATT and the WTO claiming that it is such an advantage to farmers it constitutes an unfair trade practice. Thirteen times they lost.

Alan Tracy, president of the U.S. Wheat Associates, said that the elimination of the single desk would leave a void in farmer advocacy, market development, customer support, export promotion, and quality assurance.

Listen to what the president of the Canadian National Millers Association said:

The CNMA knows of no research or evidence that demonstrates or even suggests that tinkering with the Canadian Wheat Board's mandate will create new North American market demand and opportunities for Canadian wheat flour millers.

He went on to say:

We do not anticipate the ultimate survival of the CWB without its current single-desk authority.

It kind of puts to lie this myth that the voluntary Wheat Board can survive when we all know this is chimera. He went on to say:

And we are certain that the CWB will not continue to be a reliable, full-service supplier to the Canadian wheat milling industry under those circumstances [of a dual market].

Perhaps one of the most revealing quotes we came across was by one of these big agri-food industry giants that will be the ones that will benefit. Our contention is, and in the absence of any evidence to the contrary I believe it should hold, this particular action would take hundreds of millions of dollars out of the pockets of prairie farmers and put them into the pockets of the shareholders of the agri-food giants, one of whom I will now quote. We all know Mr. Paterson, a Winnipeg grain giant. We have seen the Paterson stamp on all kinds of grain elevators all across the Prairies:

"We'll do better than we do now," says Mr. Paterson...whose family firm has climbed to more than \$1-billion in annual revenues. "Our best years were in the time before the wheat board," and that pattern should reassert itself, he says.

They are salivating. He is being quite controlled and temperate in his comments, but behind closed doors they are salivating and wringing their hands with glee that finally they can return to the bad old days of the 1920s and the 1930s. They could gouge Canadian farmers mercilessly when they owned the industry, when they owned the whole food supply chain, from the seed in the ground to the final finished product on the store shelves. They want it all. They want that vertical integration. They are going to gouge farmers, and that is how they are going to get it.

I have done some research on what the prices were like in the years when they had a single desk and the years when they did not; in the years when they had the five-year wheat pool and the years when the pool was gone; in the years when they had a voluntary wheat board and in the years when the single desk wheat board came in, in 1943. We studied these things. We have the graphs, the charts and the empirical evidence to draw from. The Conservatives have produced nothing, not a single word in support of their arguments, but the anecdotal whim and notions of a minister who is deluded and obsessed and who came here for one reason and one reason alone and that is to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board.

We are dealing with people who are in a direct personal conflict of interest. If they had any honour and decency, they would abstain from this debate and they would recuse themselves from the vote, because they personally stand to gain from abolishing the Wheat Board, if they believe their rhetoric. They say that prairie farmers will get more money if they abolish the Wheat Board. If that is true, they should abstain from this debate and recuse themselves from the debate altogether. If one accepts, as our argument is, that they would not make more money, then why are the Conservatives turning the rural prairie farm economy upside down and on its head when they have no evidence whatsoever it would be at the advantage of Canadian prairie farmers?

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• (1620)

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member insists that MPs who are prairie grain farmers refrain from voting and debating. It is not surprising since it is a fundamental doctrine of his ideology that big brother knows best and that those people who are actually impacted by these decisions, who have first-hand knowledge of these things, could not possibly be smart enough to govern themselves.

Mr. Pat Martin: Let them vote.

Mr. Jim Hillyer: Mr. Speaker, every member gets to vote for himself or herself and is not required to be forced by big brother or his or her neighbour.

Would the member explain why prairie farmers are not deserving of this equality, while people of minorities across the country are always afforded this freedom? Why not the prairie grain farmers?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Lethbridge makes my point for me, exactly. Why not let prairie grain farmers vote on how they want to market their grain? That is how this whole debate began, continues and will end. We are insisting, if the government wants to give prairie farmers more choice in how they market their grain, let them vote on it, which is what the legislation says. My colleague has helped us to make the very point we are trying to make.

The conflict of interest is so profound and so obvious. Any member of Parliament who has read the conflict of interest code that guides all of us in our conduct will know that they are duty bound and honour bound to step out of this debate and not vote on this particular piece of legislation.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on that very question, what Bill C-18 does is it puts big brother back in charge, does it not?

Prior to 1997 the board was run by three commissioners. The government of the day changed it to allow an elected board of directors, five appointed and ten elected. Now this bill fires the ten farmer-elected directors and puts in place five appointed directors. Big brother is now in charge.

I would submit that there is a terrible conflict of interest.

One of the directors is a guy by the name of David Carefoot. He has served as chief financial officer for Viterra Inc. and spent six years with Agricore United. Viterra itself has indicated that breaking the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly could be worth 50¢ to 75¢ of per share value to Viterra.

Why is the government taking the fate and control of the Wheat Board away from farmers and turning it over to government hacks who are working for multinational grain corporations from the inside? Does the member agree with me?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, it does beg the question of which side the Conservatives are on.

If the Canadian public only knew some of the dirty tricks associated with the Conservatives' efforts to stamp out the Wheat Board, they would be horrified. They carpet-bombed the whole prairie region with taxpayer-funded misinformation and propaganda. The government imposed a gag order that prohibited the Wheat

Board directors from even defending themselves and correcting the misinformation. I do not think the Canadian public with a democratic sense and a sense of right and wrong would ever tolerate such a thing.

Let me say simply that the member for Macleod should not be voting on this bill. As well, the member for Yellowhead, the member for Vegreville—Wainwright, the member for Red Deer, the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, the member for Crowfoot, and the member for Prince Albert, none of them has any right to vote on this bill.

In fact, it will be a contravention of the conflict of interest code if they stand up and vote on this bill tonight. They should not even be participating in the debate because, by their own arguments, they stand to benefit personally.

• (1625)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Service Canada; the hon. member for Etobicoke North, The Environment; and the hon. member for Charlottetown, Veterans.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to address some of the myths regarding our government's actions and our commitment for marketing freedom.

Western Canadian farmers gave our government a strong mandate to provide that marketing freedom. I want to point out, for all my colleagues in the House who will ask questions later, that the mandate is very loud and clear, particularly in central Alberta.

The legislation we are proposing would bring an end to the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board. It would give western Canadian wheat and barley farmers the marketing freedom they want and they deserve. It has been a well-known plank of our platform for years and western Canadian rural ridings continue to support our government by electing representatives who believe in marketing freedom.

Some critics may say that we are ignoring the law and the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which is hogwash, and that the act calls for a plebiscite before the Minister of Agriculture introduces a bill to add or remove a grain from the monopoly provisions of the act. However, Parliament created the Canadian Wheat Board Act and Parliament is able to amend or repeal it. In fact, even the NDP member for Winnipeg Centre agrees with us on one thing, which is that he has said that the government has the right to change the legislation.

Some will say that farmers will be devastated by this change. In fact, farmers in western Canada are very well able to manage their own affairs and market to the buyer of their choice. We see that all the time in the non-board commodities. They have built growing canola and pulse industries without a monopoly marketer in place. Why should western farmers not enjoy the same marketing freedom as other farmers in Canada?

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As well, we have heard some critics say that we have a handful of grain multinationals controlling the world trade in wheat and other cereals and that Canadian farmers will simply be at the mercy of these huge companies. Our government does not buy into those scare tactics.

Farmers in western Canada deal with grain companies when they market their canola, pulses and non-board commodities, and they do so successfully. In fact, canola and pulses are actually up in numbers compared to wheat. Those industries are growing steadily and they are attracting investment in value-added activities such as canola crushing.

We trust farmers to make their marketing choices based on what is best for their own business needs. Farmers have the skills, the information and the tools to put themselves in the driver's seat, and we are here to help ensure they can achieve all of that potential.

Agriculture has played a major role in keeping Canada's economy on solid ground through some challenging times and when other economies are faltering. Ours is not a government that sits on its hands when the people it represents see new opportunities for themselves to succeed. We are a government that has consulted with farmers since the very beginning and we are continuing to consult with them on this matter.

The Minister of Agriculture has asked department officials to meet with the industry and stakeholders, including the Canadian Wheat Board itself, throughout the past summer in order to assist in developing a transitional plan for opening the market. Our government has always said that it is open to seeing the continuation of the Canadian Wheat Board as a voluntary marketing option for producers. That has been the campaign commitment and that is the campaign promise that will be kept.

The board has some very bright and effective employees and should be able to operate in this new environment. If farmers choose to support the new model, they will have every opportunity to succeed.

Peter Phillips, a public policy professor at the University of Saskatchewan, believes that the board can and should have a long-term future. He points out that 60% of the producers say that they like to use the board, so that is a pretty good client base to start with right there.

Our government is committed to creating an open market for western Canadian grain farmers that attracts investment, encourages innovation, creates value-added jobs and will build a stronger Canadian economy. Canadian farmers and processors are eager to compete in changing world markets and to meet the ever evolving demands of today's consumers.

Over the past five years, our government has worked hard with farmers to help grow their businesses, drive Canada's economy and leverage our natural advantages of land and resources. Our most precious resource is the ingenuity, commitment, dedication and hard work of our farmers.

Canada's economic action plan has invested in that natural advantage and delivered real benefits to agriculture across the country in creating jobs in our various communities. We are a

government that acts on facts and sound judgment and on the expressed will of Canadian farmers. The 21st century will be a challenging and exciting time for agriculture in Canada. Our farmers deserve the freedom to meet these challenges and opportunities as they see fit. It is a matter of economics, dignity and respect.

•(1630)

In fact, the C.D. Howe Institute released a report entitled, "Pulling the Plug on Monopoly Power: Reform for the Canadian Wheat Board", dated June 23, 2011. This report takes on the logic of monopoly supporters who argue that, by selling together, western Canadian farmers exert more market power in wheat markets and receive higher returns than if they competed against each other. However, the report underlines that the declining global market shares of Canadian wheat makes it increasingly unlikely that the Wheat Board is able to exert this market power. As a result, reform is needed. This reform includes reconsidering the CWB's monopoly.

I know my colleagues in the opposition are dying to hear the report, which explains the Herfindahl-Hirschman index, which measures market concentration. It illustrates how unlikely it is that the Canadian Wheat Board would exert pricing in the world wheat market. Canada's share of annual production has fallen from 8% in 1962 to less than 4% today. Likewise, Canada's share of the export market has fallen from over 25% to less than 14% in that same time period. Equally, Canadian market share in the world barley export markets has declined from 50% in the early 1980s to less than 10% today. In that sense, the Wheat Board is a price taker in so many of these markets.

The report also supports our government's position that, even without sole buying and selling authority, the Canadian Wheat Board's existing infrastructure, expertise and worldwide distribution of its trading staff would make it an attractive pool for farmers to voluntarily participate in and successfully sell their wheat in world markets. The option also remains available to farmers who prefer to specialize in producing wheat for domestic consumption, rather than trading it on the world markets. The economics are clear.

I invite my colleagues opposite to join us in this exciting new chapter for Canadian agriculture, rather than focusing on the negative rhetoric and all the things that we cannot do. We should focus on this opportunity for change. It is inevitable in all facets of life, and western Canadian wheat and barley farmers deserve the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers, not only in Canada but around the world.

I encourage all members of the House to think this through and show their support for western Canadian farmers as they capitalize on this new opportunity.

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was in Regina for the announcement of the investment that Mr. Al-Katib is making in the durum pasta processing plant. My husband, who is a farmer, is very excited about it because he will be able to sell directly to that pasta plant.

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Because I could have a conflict of interest in drawing this conclusion myself, why does the member think that my husband would like to sell directly to that pasta plant?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, I suppose in the law of extensions, my father is a farmer. I grew up on a farm and we grew grain. I do not know if I will be asked to recuse myself from the vote as well.

However, the reality is that it does not make any sense to me or to anybody else who holds any value in owning their own personal property. The principle that people can take all of the risk in investing in their crop, machinery and purchasing the land and, at the end of the day, if they happen to grow wheat or barley, they can be subjugated to when they can sell their wheat, to whom and for what price makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. What we are providing is an opportunity for those farmers who wish to collectively pool and try to negotiate a better price through that pool, using the talented people at the Wheat Board who wish to stay on in its new form, but we need to allow those individual farmers who want to make those marketing choices for themselves to do so.

I have constituents in my riding who went to jail over this issue. This is a ballot box question in the constituency of Wetaskiwin and I can assure members that I did not lose a single poll in the rural portion of the riding.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am listening carefully to this debate and to all the points made on both sides of the House. I listened to my colleague, and I would like him to explain why 62% of farmers voted to keep the single desk marketing for wheat and 51% voted to keep the single desk marketing for barley.

I am having difficulty reconciling this information with the fact that we often hear from the other side of the House, the government side, that farmers want markets that are fully open. They try to make us believe that western farmers are not worried about the big multinationals coming in to trample them. How can he explain the vote results?

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Mr. Speaker, if my colleague had actually listened to my speech, she would know that we do acknowledge that there are farmers out there who wish to use the Canadian Wheat Board. However, that does not change the fundamental principle that an individual goes through the risk of having that land, buying that equipment, owning that property and taking all the risk.

The critic for the NDP was a carpenter. If he went through all the risk of purchasing the material, buying his tools and equipment, buying the lumber that is available at market price, speculating on a home and then actually had some board come in and tell him the price he could sell the home for, that would be outrageous. He, honestly, would be outraged that he could not sell that house at the price he needed in order to be competitive and keep his business running.

. . . The same principle applies here. For those farmers who think they can get value out of it, and there are some who will, this legislation

would provide for a viable Canadian Wheat Board to exist on a voluntary basis. If it is as good as everybody says that it is, then we should not fear ending the monopoly. If the folks who are working there have the contacts, have the marketplace already established, they have already got the competitive advantage over the individual farmers.

I have a question for the hon. member. Why are so many individual farmers telling me that they are not satisfied with the status quo?

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP) Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank all my colleagues for their, at times, very impassioned speeches about the Canadian Wheat Board. There is no question that on both sides of the House there is a real delineation of thought as to what it is we believe that farmers want.

It is ironic that there are farmers among us on both sides of the House who have different viewpoints on it. That is fair from the perspective of having different viewpoints, but what I find amazing about this whole debate is the government's insistence that somehow the market is the direct benefit to all farmers at all times.

It reminds me of my younger days when I was first married and my wife and I decided to seek out a financial planner and talk about raising some money to buy a home and do all the things that young couples do. I interviewed a financial planner who talked to me about the market. I thought it was wonderful that he was telling me exactly how it works, except what he kept repeating was not to worry and that things always get better. What I am hearing the government tell farmers about wheat, durum and barley is not to worry, it will always gets better and they will get better prices.

I have heard all about the risks that farmers take and they do. As the critic for agriculture, I understand the risks that farmers take when they put seed in the ground, buy equipment and decide on the rotation for the year. They make all of those decisions and then have to face the vagaries of the weather, whether it be the floods in southern Saskatchewan or southern Manitoba this year or frost.

Conservatives on this side never talk about the downside of the market. My friends on the other side constantly want to teach us about the markets, which is nice, but they should at least be honest and say that markets go up, yes indeed, and markets go down, absolutely. Folks who bought RRSPs in 2008 got a bit of recovery after that, but ask them how they are doing in 2011.

When people throw themselves to the markets, they do not have ultimate control. They are not the markets, they are just players. Depending on size, they are either big players or not so big. If they are not so big, they do not have the same clout as big players, which means that ultimately the big players make more than the smaller players or takes advantage of them.

My friends on the other side talk about value-added and this new pasta plant that is going to open in the Prairies, which is a wonderful thing. They insist that means that primary producers, the farmers, in the west would get a better price if they go on the open market. We have seen a stock circular put out by a particular company. If we happen to go through it, one line says its expectation of making additional profit is by paying lower prices for primary products.

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It reminds us of what happens when value is added. The value gets added in and the price gets taken at the other side, which is not the farmer but the consumer. The middle guy, who is the producer-processor, is not the farmer. The farmer is at the other end of that chain actually putting things in at the beginning where the first price comes. When the processor or producing-manufacturing group in the centre who has the power cannot get more money from the consumer end and wants to increase profits, because that is what the company's stockholders want, they squeeze it out in costs.

My friends on the other side constantly let us know how knowledgeable they are on these things. All business owners know that they wring out costs if they can and they wring it out at the bottom, at the front end, the farmer. When farmers do not have the ability to go somewhere else, they are told they can go where they want.

I wonder how that will look in five years when they do not get the producer cars that they rely on any more or the track time they need to get to the coast, port or wherever it happens to be they cannot get any more because there is a new potash mine and all of a sudden CN or CP is saying the mine pays more and the farmers can wait.

• (1640)

My friends on the other side have talked about pulses. There is no question that pulse farms have done very well. One of the biggest complaints from the group around the pulse organization is that the biggest impediment in their ability to pay farmers well is getting their crop to market. Which market? Not in this country. They literally take it 5,000, 8,000, 10,000 kilometres across the globe to a market in either India or Southeast Asia. The largest single impediment to getting their crop there on time or losing the market, because they can, is the railway.

They are paying costs because ships are lying at anchor in the Port of Vancouver waiting for their product to get there and they are being held up because CN decided to send something else that made it more money. When grain farmers end up in that queue, and they will, they cannot move their product to market and the premium that is suggested by this market free enterprise government will be lost because they cannot get it there on time. The pulse groups are saying today that they will lose the market, not the premium, but the market, period, if they cannot move their crop.

It begs the question, if indeed we have such difficulty on both sides of the House on whether we should do this or that, we have really come to an impasse. We think we are right and members opposite think they are right. Why do we not just ask the folks who actually do it? Why do we not just ask the farmer?

It has been said here many times that there are 8 out of 10 elected board members. The government changed the requirements on how to elect them. An individual had to grow so much wheat. They had to do it in consecutive years, otherwise they did not get a ballot.

I heard earlier from some colleagues who said the widow of a farmer got a ballot for her husband, and that is unfortunate. I would not like my mum to get a ballot for my dad who is deceased either, but that happens from time to time.

We have folks on election lists in this country who are no longer with us. Lists sometimes are not that good. In this House we know

lists are not always that good because we have our own lists of constituents. How many times have we sent things to constituents to have it returned to us because they do not live there or they are deceased?

However, if we were to hold a legitimate, government-held vote of the producers, agreed upon by the board, and asked them what they want, I think this House would be satisfied. On this side of the House we would be satisfied. If the producers told us what they want, we would say it is fair. Nothing more, nothing less. It is fair.

Now we are asking the folks we represent what they would like to do. Would they like this open market as has been described by members on the other side, market freedom, or would they want to continue down the road they have with the Wheat Board. If we asked them that question, and we could debate how we form the question, but if we asked them an honest, fair question from both sides, not a one-sided question, and let them decide, this House could then go about its business because they had made a decision.

Anecdotal stories are being told from one side or the other. My colleagues from Alberta say that in Alberta, this is what producers are saying. People call me from Alberta, and I am not from Alberta, who say they want to keep the Wheat Board. There is no question that there are some folks who want to keep it and there are some folks who do not. There is no question about that. Why do we not simply let them have the final say on all of this.

We should decide on the question we should put to them after debate, let them decide for themselves and accept their wishes, based on the fact that it is their ability and their democratic right to make a final decision on their lives. It is not necessarily mine. I do not farm wheat, and a lot of us do not, but at least farmers would be making a decision for themselves, not having it imposed on them by either side of the House, regardless of how the vote goes.

• (1645)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague from Welland, obviously speaking about something that he does not have a really good grasp of, and that is unfortunate.

I would have been happy to provide some of the information that I have tried to provide to some of the colleagues across the way that have not dealt with this lack of freedom. The member talked about who phoned him and who did not phone him.

There are farmers in western Canada who have been waiting for 35, 40 years for this, for the simple, same freedom that farmers in Ontario have had for a number of years. They have grown their business. They have been able to export wheat. Farmers in western Canada have not had that freedom.

I would ask that hon. member, why does he not think that I, as a farmer within the Wheat Board jurisdictional area, should be treated as any less of a citizen than his farmers in Ontario?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I would agree with the hon. member's comment at the front end.

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Nonetheless, as to the question not being the way we wanted it when it was asked at the plebiscite, 62% of western farmers said they wanted to keep the Wheat Board. If that was not a good question or a fair question, let us craft one and ask them.

I agree with my friend who says that coming from Alberta he understands the Wheat Board and wheat farmers. To say that just because we come from Ontario we do not understand wheat farmers or we have not learned to understand what it is about them, I do not think is necessarily a fair comment.

The bottom line is that if we ask farmers a fair question and the decision is to not have a wheat board, so be it. However, if the response is that the farmers want to keep it, then so be it also.

• (1650)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the previous discussion, surely the government would extend the same rights to western farmers as it did extend to those on the Ontario wheat marketing board who no longer market under that board. They were given the right to make a decision. Western farmers have not been given that right.

I have asked my NDP colleague about one of the arguments of the government that this would be great for processing and that there has been no processing since the board was in place. The facts are these: Canada processes three times more malting barley per capita than the United States; wheat milling capacity in western Canada has grown by 11.8% in the last decade compared to 9% in the northern tiers of the United States; and four new western Canadian mills have been built during that period while the number of mills in the northern United States has remained the same. That has been with a board of directors of farmers in place.

The act, under section 12, says:

Every person holding office as an elected director of the Canadian Wheat Board immediately before the day on which this Part comes into force ceases to hold office on that day.

Have those farmer elected directors not done a good job in increasing processing capacity and in maximizing returns to farmers?

Why does my colleague believe that the government wants to get rid of those farmer elected directors and take their right away to be a master of their own destiny through their own marketing institution, as others in Canada are allowed to do, like dairy and poultry?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, I can only speak to what I believe is the decision not to allow farmer appointed or farmer elected board members.

The government has said that it will allow a voluntary Canadian wheat board. One would think that if it wants it to be voluntary and it believes that it is okay if folks want to join it, at the very least they should be allowed to decide if they want to vote for the folks who want a voluntarily association. One would think that is what the government would want.

One hates to have these thoughts that five folks who are appointed might just want to get rid of it, and that it might be made in such a way that is so draconian that those who actually want to voluntarily

be part of it will be driven away by the folks who make decisions in their best interest.

That is why we have democracy. That is why we elect folks. The other side talks about how many of its members were elected and the fact that it has a majority government. True fact. The members could point to the fact that the reason that happened is because folks voted for them. True fact.

If that is the case, why not extend it to those particular farmers, if indeed the government wants a voluntary association, and simply say that at the very least it will give people the right to vote for the folks to represent them on a voluntary association called the Canadian wheat board?

Then again, if the government really wants to do that, it should have a plebiscite vote and find out if Canadian farmers really want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting for 35 years to deliver this speech. That is a long time.

I am a wheat farmer, I must confess. I farmed for over 30 years in Alberta. I stand to speak in favour of the marketing freedom for grain farmers act.

Anyone listening to this debate might wonder why we would have to do that. Do not all farmers have the right to market what they produce? That is partially correct, but only if a farmer lives east of the Manitoba-Ontario border or west of Creston, B.C. All farmers living in between, which is the wheat belt area of this country, have been under the control of a monopoly seller of wheat and barley for human consumption. That is the other thing a lot of people do not understand. It is durum wheat for pasta, bread wheats and barley for malt barley.

We would argue that the producers of those crops should have the same right to the freedom to market, to the same freedom of choice, as farmers who live in Ontario, Prince Edward Island, west of Creston B.C., and in fact all around the world. That is what this whole debate is about. Some members understand that because they have heard that term enough times in the House. Those producers should have the same freedom of choice.

This is the most draconian and outdated marketing system of any country in the world. No other industry would accept this situation. No other industry would have come to Canada. Let us picture the big three automakers coming to Canada to build cars if we had set up a monopoly that would tell the industry what colour of car it could build and what price it would get, and that the industry would get paid 18 months after the monopoly chose to sell that car. We would not have an auto industry, nor would we have a communications industry, if they were harnessed with the same binding regulations that those of us who produce grain in western Canada have.

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A new, voluntary Canadian Wheat Board will be set up once this legislation is passed. It will be an option. Just as I, as a producer of wheat in western Canada, should never have been forced to sell to a monopoly, so have we chosen not to force those who would choose to use a pooling mechanism to not be able to have a pooling option. The Minister of Agriculture has given this a great deal of thought, and he has put in place an option that will provide a pooling mechanism for those who are more comfortable with that approach. We are providing a transition period for this new board to develop a strategy, a five-year period to set this up. We hope that those people who enjoy the aspects of pooling will use this option. I as a wheat producer will not be forced to use it, as I have been through my 30-some years of growing wheat.

Many farmers in western Canada have moved away from this monopoly. As the Minister of Agriculture said in answer to a question the other day, farmers voted with their air seeders. A lot of people in this room do not understand what an air seeder is. It is a seeding mechanism for farms all across the world. Farmers chose not to grow wheat because they could not hedge their price. They knew what their costs were, but they had no way of knowing, through a monopoly, what their price was going to be.

I myself moved away from growing wheat. I only grow it now as a rotation for the health of my soil, for disease control on my farm. Otherwise I grow peas, lentils, chickpeas and canola, because I can market them in the middle of the night anywhere in the world when I see a price that I like.

•(1655)

I have a friend in Australia who grows wheat. When the prices went high in the spring of 2008, the highest we have ever seen, he was able to lock in a price for two years of production because there were companies out there that were willing to do that. He had his sale prices locked in for two years.

I do not know tomorrow what I would get for the wheat that I produce this year. However, I do know that for the wheat harvested on my farm barely two weeks ago, the return to me will not come until January 2013. What other business would accept that as a payment model? I have no idea what the price is going to be, but I know my costs. Why would I grow wheat?

A report came out today stating that our population is going to be 15 billion people in 2100. Who is going to feed those people? It would not be a country held back on production because the farmers could not afford to grow wheat. They would grow other crops—peas, lentils, chickpeas—but they would stop growing wheat if they were held under this monopoly, and we have seen it happen. Wheat acreage has fallen in this country dramatically. We have given up the advantage of some of the new varieties of wheat that could be grown because the Wheat Board is in such an archaic state of mind that we could not develop the new varieties of wheat that would actually help feed the world.

We have seen the yields of corn in the United States triple because of research. We have seen canola varieties producing double of what they were. Where is wheat? It is maybe 10% or 20% more. We have great opportunity for farmers in western Canada to realize the benefits available to them if we can get out from underneath this archaic system.

As I said, cash flow matters to farmers. They are very innovative, they understand their business costs and they need to know how to cover those costs. When they grow another crop that they can market themselves, they can pick a price and sell it. However, under the monopoly powers of the Wheat Board, they do not even know if the crop would actually be moved off their farm in a year.

It is an archaic system. The Wheat Board should never be allowed to decide whether I want to sell my crop, but they have been able to do that. As I say, it is a very archaic system.

I have met grain buyers in other countries. For example, when I was in Cairo, Egypt, food importer brokers asked me why I would not sell them my wheat. I said that they had to deal with the Canadian Wheat Board. They said they had tried, but it would not answer their phone calls.

We have no access to market. If I go back to peas and lentils, I choose whom I want to sell it to and I choose the price I want. I am a price taker, there is no doubt about it, but I can also hedge that price. I can sell it into the future. There are futures markets. There are a whole lot of simple arguments that are being neglected.

I will quote a good friend of mine from southwestern Saskatchewan, Cherilyn Jolly-Nagel. I know her and her folks very well. She is a past president of the Western Canadian Wheat Growers. I quote:

I'm already planning to increase my durum acres next year. It's just the kind of investment that will help boost our economy, boost our profits and help boost the provincial economy.

She is speaking about the first new pasta plant in western Canada, which is being built just outside of Regina, and about the kinds of benefits we will see grow.

There should have been a malt plant in central Alberta. I see the barley going past my house down to Great Falls, Montana. Why is that? It is because the board stopped it from being built in Canada.

We need the freedom. We need the choice. It is that simple.

•(1700)

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I heard my hon. colleague on the other side of the House say that all farmers should have the right to market what they produce and market it as they want. For milk, chicken, turkey and egg producers, who come under supply management, does he advocate exactly the same approach?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. They do have a choice, and they chose a supply management system. This western system was forced on farmers. They never had a plebiscite asking them if they want to sell grain under a monopoly. That was never an option. Supply management is a choice of those farmers, and they welcome that choice.

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However, we are missing the point of this whole debate. It is simply about the same choice, as I have said before, that farmers in western Canada do not have: the choice to market our products where and to whom we want, and to provide food for the world.

I go back to my earlier comment. It is very important for Canada, as one of the major food producers in this world, to be able to realize our potential to help feed the world. Our farmers are ready to do it; I wish the House were ready to support it.

• (1705)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the member was emphasizing that those who participate in supply management had a choice and have voted to participate in something that has restricted their marketing opportunities in some ways but expanded them in many others.

If the Conservatives are so convinced that western farmers do not want the Wheat Board, why do they not conduct a plebiscite at this point and give them the same right to choose that others have had? Why do they not let them vote to see whether western farmers really want to keep the Wheat Board?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I realize that a number of members have not been in the House very long, but we have had many discussions about plebiscites. We have had a barley plebiscite. We have had all sorts of plebiscites, and every time a credible question has been asked, the outcome has been that farmers in western Canada want the same freedom as farmers in the rest of Canada. It is that simple.

We also had a plebiscite on May 2. I believe it was a resounding success. We campaigned on freedom. What better thing to campaign on than freedom? We won a majority based on allowing farmers the same freedoms as their friends and relatives in the rest of this country.

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my father-in-law switched from grain to beef in the 1990s because he could not make a living on grain.

Once wheat is able to be marketed on the open system, does the member believe there will be an opportunity for families to hand the farms down? I have seen that some people just cannot afford to keep their farm, so they sell it because they are not able to hand it down. Is there an opportunity here for someone like the member to hand that farm down if he or she should choose to do so?

Hon. Ted Menzies: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague to the west, who is, by the way, still within the Wheat Board's jurisdiction. Just in case he might be thinking about growing wheat and selling it somewhere else before August 1 of next year, I would caution him about that.

In response, this would absolutely be a benefit to what we hear spoken about in this chamber many times, which is the small family farm. Many organic producers decided that was the way for their niche operations to survive. It is not growing broad acre crops on broad acre farms, but niche organic crops.

The Canadian Wheat Board soon stepped in and said it would have none of that. It started marketing the crops for the organic producers who had already set up their own markets. It charged them a premium to sell to the same buyers they were selling to before. The

middleman won; the small farmer lost, because of the monopoly powers of the board.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon (Laval—Les Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak against Bill C-18, which would dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. This bill is a direct attack on family farmers and is a direct affront to the very principle of democracy. On September 12, nearly 60% of Canadian farmers voted in favour of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board. However, the Conservatives refuse to hold a plebiscite on dismantling the board. The government plans to destroy the single desk against the wishes of Canadian farmers. This would not be the first time that the Conservatives claimed to have received a strong mandate from Canadians with only 40% support.

The Canadian Wheat Board is not funded by Canadian taxpayers. So why are the Conservatives rushing to destroy this organization? The answer is simple. If the Canadian Wheat Board no longer holds the balance of power when negotiating with its economic partners, Canadian farmers will be left on their own, will no longer have any bargaining power and will be forced to sell their wheat and barley at lower prices. That will have disastrous effects.

First of all, Canadian producers will be forced to sell their products at lower prices. Lower selling prices also means lower profit margins. And God knows that during a recession and tough economic times, farmers who are already working in a sector that requires very large financial investments did not need another blow like this.

Furthermore, the Canadian Wheat Board's bargaining power has enabled Canada to maintain some independence for Canadian farmers and the Canadian agri-food industry with respect to the major world players. With the dismantling of the board, this independence will disappear and big American grain companies will be free to move their operations to Canada, which will gradually kill the economic independence of Canada's agri-food industry.

I have heard the Conservatives say that we are trying to scare farmers and that the expected effects are false. Well, I have a little surprise, my friends. By way of comparison, let us look at what happened in Australia after a board similar to the Canadian Wheat Board was dismantled.

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Before the Australian Wheat Board was dismantled, Australian wheat could command \$99 per tonne over American wheat. After the Australian Wheat Board was dismantled, things went awry. In fact, in December 2008, the price of Australian wheat dropped to \$27 per tonne below U.S. wheat. In just three years, the 40,000 farmers who were members of the Australian Wheat Board all became customers of Cargill, one of the world's largest agribusiness corporations, which is privately owned and based in the United States. Once again, it seems as though this government is clearing the way for large American corporations to the economic disadvantage of its own people and voters. Once again, the Conservatives are putting the interests of the private sector ahead of the public interest of Canadians.

Now, here is what we are proposing for Canadian farmers.

We believe in respecting democracy. As a result, we believe that any decision about the Wheat Board must be made by the farmers, since they are the ones who manage this organization. Since 62% of farmers voted against dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board, we believe that the government should respect that decision or, at the very least, hold an official government plebiscite on the issue and, as a result, withdraw its bill.

What do members of the Canadian Wheat Board think of the possible dismantling of their organization? While the Conservatives claim that farmers are overjoyed at this prospect, Allen Orberg, a farmer and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, thinks that this government does not have a plan. In his opinion, the government has done no analysis and its approach is based solely on its blind commitment to marketing freedom. He added that the government's reckless approach will throw Canada's grain industry into disarray, jeopardize a \$5 billion a year export sector and shift money from the pockets of Canadian farmers into the hands of American corporations.

• (1710)

What economic impact will this dismantling have on the overall Canadian population? First, Canada risks losing the money brought in through board premiums, which can represent between \$200 million and \$500 million per year. Second, as I said earlier, being a farmer today means considerable investment, be it in machinery or basic farm upkeep. Dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board will have a domino effect. By selling their product at a lower price, the farmers' profit margin will decrease. Less profit also means less money to pack back loans. That means that, at the end of the day, it is the Canadian taxpayers who will pay because the government will have to increase subsidies for farmers so that they can survive and make a living.

Dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board means that farmers will see their revenues drop considerably. The government will then have to pick the pockets of Canadian taxpayers to fix the disaster it will have created.

To conclude, I implore the government to rethink its decision, to realize that it is going down the wrong path and to understand that it is putting farmers and the Canadian economy at risk. Therefore, it should withdraw Bill C-18.

• (1715)

[*English*]

Hon. Lynne Yelich (Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke about what corporations the United States will move into Canada but he missed the point about the new pasta plant that was just announced in Regina, Saskatchewan. It will be the first one in western Canada. The plant is owned by a very successful person from Saskatchewan who wants to create jobs in Saskatchewan. This business will be able to buy its grains directly from the farmer. The farmers are very excited about this new freedom to sell directly to the pasta plant.

How does that square up with why we in western Canada cannot have the same privilege as those in eastern Canada, not having to ship our grain down here to be processed, as before with pasta and many of the other grains that come down here and then we needed to have it shipped back to buy it as consumers? Why are we not afforded the same luxuries as eastern Canada?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

We are not saying they are not entitled to the same rights as others. Since the beginning we have been asking the government to put it to a vote. It is very simple. The government is saying that the Wheat Board was created without anyone asking for opinions and that it will be dismantled without anyone asking for opinions. The government should not repeat past mistakes.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, spinning off the question from the minister, it is not as bad as the government member tries to make us believe. As I mentioned earlier, there is far greater processing capacity for malting barley per capita, which came into place in the last number of years, three times as many in Canada as in the United States, whose producers have the freedom to market wherever they want. Wheat milling capacity in western Canada has grown by 11.8% in the last decade, compared to 9% in the northern tiers in the United States. Therefore, is not as bad as the member makes us believe.

However, there is an important question here. The government is basically saying that producers should have the freedom to market when, where and how they want, which is what, I believe, the minister said it earlier.

Does the member not believe that if that is the policy that is approached, it would completely undermine the supply management system in this country?

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[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. We all know full well that with that type of market the Americans, who have the purchasing power, will come buy our grain and it is truly the Americans who will benefit, not our farmers here in Canada.

• (1720)

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, should we have a referendum on same sex marriage or a referendum on whether postal workers should be allowed to form a union?

[*English*]

Should we have a referendum on the privatization of the CBC and on what kind of programming should be allowed on TV, or should individuals choose for themselves what not to watch on TV, who to marry and how to market their grain?

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Pilon: Mr. Speaker, that is a very odd question because I do not believe that in all those things the hon. member listed, there is a law saying that before the Wheat Board is dismantled or before we do anything with regard to same sex marriage, there should be a referendum. However, in the rules that governed the creation of the Canadian Wheat Board, it clearly states that a referendum has to be held before it can be dismantled.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is the economy, in which the agriculture industry plays a vital role. Canadian farmers feed the world and they deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions. We believe that all Canadian farmers should be able to position their businesses to capture the marketing opportunities that are open to them.

Nine years ago, almost to this very day, Noel Hyslip was hauled off to jail wearing leg irons and handcuffs in front of his wife, three kids and parents. He and 12 other Alberta farmers were sentenced to 45 days in the Lethbridge jail. Their crime was driving trucks full of their own wheat over the border into the United States. These farmers were detained, fined and jailed for selling their own wheat outside the Canadian Wheat Board. Yes, this is Canada. I know it is hard to imagine that kind of thing could happen here. However, these pioneers have no regrets about the actions they took and the sacrifices they made.

Mr. Hyslip was recently quoted as saying:

I'm proud of that day and the sacrifice we all made.

Going to jail to free western farmers was definitely worth it. It frustrates me that almost one decade has passed since then. It's hard to believe such a law still exists in Canada.

These farmers are all looking forward to the day when all farmers in western Canada have the legal right to market their wheat and barley wherever and however they wish. This bill would enshrine that right by allowing western farmers to market their own wheat and barley on their own or through a voluntary pool.

The 68-year-old Canadian Wheat Board monopoly is yesterday's solution to yesterday's problem. Farmers like Noel Hyslip and thousands of others across the prairies are focused on tomorrow, not

yesterday. They are ambitious, entrepreneurial, successfully market their other crops and they need new solutions, not the status quo. More than that, our economy needs it. As we recently saw with the launching of the pasta plant in Regina, marketing freedom will unlock new value-added investment, new jobs and new growth for Canada's economy.

Business people, the economic drivers of our economy, agree on the need for an end to the single desk marketing system. At its annual meeting last year, the membership of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, a network representing some 192,000 businesses of all sizes, in all sectors of the economy and in all regions of the country, approved a resolution that reiterated its support for a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board. It was not the first time it had done so. This most recent resolution was an update of the group's position from 2007.

These are businessmen and women from across Canada, job creators, who have the interest of a strong national economy at heart. What are they calling for? They are calling for the same thing wanted by western farmers, who are small and medium-sized businesses in their own right. They want a release from under the thumb of a monopoly and the freedom to shop their product to the highest bidder for the best price. This is what the Chamber of Commerce resolution had to say about the Wheat Board:

—[it] restricts (value-added) investment in wheat and barley, significantly diminishing the ability of farmers and industry to respond to market demands and earn a premium return in recognition of the innovation provided, including innovation in value-added processing.

It is pretty clear that top business people, the job creators that all members' constituents rely on for employment, think that the CWB is anti-business. It went on to say:

Removal of the single desk in other countries...“has led to new investment and growth in value-added activities, benefiting all members of wheat and barley value chains from consumers to processors to farmers.”

Western Canadian grain farmers want the same marketing freedom and opportunities as other farmers in Canada and around the world. They want the freedom to make their own business decisions, whether it is to market individually or through a voluntary pooling entity. Disappointingly, opponents to change are taking an all-or-nothing approach: single desk or death.

• (1725)

If opposition members will not listen to western grain farmers, will they at least listen to the businesspeople from their own communities who, through the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, are saying that their insistence on robbing farmers of marketing choice is an anti-business, anti-prosperity attitude?

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The year of the entrepreneur is 2011. I hope the opposition members will get with the times and support marketing choice and freedom and opportunity for all Canadian entrepreneurs, including western grain farmers.

Farmers have told the CWB and us that there is a better way to give entrepreneurial farmers like Noel Hyslip the boost their business needs to compete and a better way for those farmers who prefer to market their wheat through a voluntary pool. Our government is offering an inclusive and progressive way forward that would offer western Canadian wheat and barley farmers both opportunity and security.

There is no doubt that co-operatives helped to build agriculture across Canada and that they continue to play a role today in a very tough and competitive global marketplace. However, these organizations are where farmers commit their production investment because they choose to, not because they are forced to. Co-operative and compulsion cannot go together. Competition and choice will breathe new life into Canada's grain industry.

Canada's grain industry has already achieved outstanding results, but we know it can do every better.

Over the past 25 years, the share of area seeded by CWB grains in western Canada decreased from about three-quarters to one-half and the Canadian market share in the world barley export markets has declined by more than 65%. Meanwhile the share of area seeded to canola almost tripled, oats acreage in Manitoba grew by over one-third and the pulse industry grew to \$2 billion in export sales.

We know that there is room for growth in our wheat and barley industry. The time is right for action. Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity. We need to unfetter our farmers so they can continue to drive our economy and feed the world.

Everyday Canadians also see the injustice of making western farmers beholden to a Wheat Board monopoly.

In a recent letter, Henry and Erna Goerzen, constituents of mine from Didsbury, wrote, "We heartily support you and our Conservative Government in the legislation that will give choice for Western grain farmers to market their grain themselves or to sell through the Wheat Board. It is a choice that has been denied to our farmers for far too long. We wish the legislation may be approved very soon".

However, the last word goes to farmers themselves.

Dan Jorsvick, a farmer near Olds, sent me a letter that said, "I would like to clearly express my support for the initiative to remove the CWB. Like many farmers, we had registered our vote regarding the CWB years ago, with our decision to not apply for their "permit book" and to not "market" our grain through their organization. We have developed the skills to market our grain to domestic feed users and I hope we have the opportunity to apply these skills to explore markets beyond our borders".

David and Ann Smith made a similar point, when they wrote, "We urge you and your colleagues and our Majority Conservative Government, to make every effort to bring about the much needed changes in order to provide a more equitable grain marketing system

for Western Canada. It must be realized that the younger generation of farmers are very proficient businessmen and women, with many options available to them, plus all the modern technology at hand to carry out their own marketing choices".

I will end with an inspiring letter from Amy Hewson, a young farmer who farms with her husband southeast of Saskatchewan, "My husband and I are expecting a baby in January and we're both very excited to know that this child will grow up in a country where it's not a crime for his parents to sell their own wheat and barley".

We need to ensure that the freedom fighters did not go to prison in vain and we owe it to the next generation of farmers who will put food on our tables to get this job done.

Our government is committed to giving every western Canadian grain farmer the marketing freedom they want and deserve. When passed, this legislation will do just that.

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is all very interesting. I would like to ask the following question: what about the 38,261 farmers who participated in the vote organized by the Canadian Wheat Board? I guess their votes do not count.

[*English*]

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question in return. The voices of all the farmers throughout western Canada who voted for our Conservative majority government to be in place to do just this, to give them the freedom of choice to market their own wheat and their own barley, do those voices not count? Because they certainly should.

This is a democratic country and people have a right to make their own choices about how they market their products and the fruits of their labour. All the bill asks us to do is to give farmers the choice that all other businesses in our country have, the choice to take the products that they have created with their hands and from their innovation and to sell it however and to whomever they choose. That is all the legislation seeks to do. What we are asking for our western grain farmers is a very basic right that all businesses should have.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member for Wild Rose believes what he said in his comment then let us put it to the test. Is there anyone in the country who actually believes that the only reason anybody voted for the Conservative Party in western Canada was because of the Canadian Wheat Board? Is that what he is trying to imply in the House?

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I ask the member to put it to the test. Section 47.1 under the legislation says we ought to do that. The Wheat Board says that it has 62% support on its plebiscite. Why will the Conservatives not put it to the test? Why are they taking the voice of western farmers, which was granted to them by law, away from them and not allowing them the choice to tell us their view? If they voted for doing away with the Wheat Board single desk, we would support it.

Second, does the member really believe that if thousands of trucks roll across the U.S. border, the 49th parallel, that the U.S. is not going to respond? People broke the law, they went across the international—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. We need some time for the hon. member to respond.

The hon. member for Wild Rose.

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, the member wanted to know if I felt that the only reason western Canadians voted for our party was to eliminate the Wheat Board monopoly and have marketing choice. Certainly not. They voted for us for many reasons because of a lot of the positions that we hold dear. They chose to reject his party because its ideas were not what western Canadians wanted to see.

Western farmers, particularly, want the choice to make their own decisions about the marketing of their wheat and barley. That is what we are trying to do with the legislation. They have made that very clear many times in the past, and they continue to make it very clear now. I have a number of constituents who have written me, emailed me and phoned me, about this very issue. They are very eager to see the Wheat Board monopoly ended and to see marketing choice brought in. I can certainly assure the hon. member that western farmers do in fact want to see this choice to market their own products.

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is kind of entertaining. I guess the Liberal Party holds its nominations just like the CWB does its directors elections as it sees fit.

I know the member is a forward looking person. Based on the things that I see happening in the future, they say that this co-operative cannot exist in this new environment, yet I look at Federated Co-op, which is a good example in Saskatchewan. There is a Wal-Mart in Prince Albert and where does Co-op build its store? Right across from Wal-Mart. They compete head-on.

Could the member tell us how he feels the CWB in this new entity will survive in this new marketplace?

• (1735)

Mr. Blake Richards: Mr. Speaker, that is a great question. It certainly is nice to hear a question about someone looking forward and trying to figure out how we can make the best for farmers, so we can give them the choices they need to make the decision whether they want to market through a co-operative or whether they want to be able to sell it on their own through other means that they have at their disposal. Certainly there are many opportunities available to our farmers now.

It is nice to hear those kinds of questions, rather than what we hear from the Liberals and the NDP on the other side, which are simply

trying to look at yesterday's solutions instead of looking at tomorrow and coming up with ways we can go forward.

I do see the opportunity for a voluntary wheat board to thrive in that kind of market. I think some farmers will choose that route and some will choose to market on their own. Farmers deserve and need that choice to be able to make those decisions for themselves.

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this debate today, even though I am sure that my Conservative colleagues will not be as pleased. Every time that a Quebecer rises—as I often have—to speak about the Canadian Wheat Board, they tell us that we have no business talking about this issue because it has nothing to do with us. But it is perfectly fine for them to interfere in Quebec's business. One thing is for sure: no one can deny that I have experience from my six years as vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-food. It is no secret that the topic of dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board was often on this committee's agenda.

What the majority Conservative government wants to do with the Canadian Wheat Board comes as no surprise. In 2002, when he was a member of Parliament for the Canadian Alliance, the current Prime Minister moved a motion to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. The day that the current Prime Minister became leader of the Conservative Party, when there was a merger of the Canadian Alliance and the Reform Party, or that party and the Conservatives, the dismantling of the board became part of the new party's platform. The party tried all kinds of things, but fortunately it was a minority government at the time.

I remember that the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, before being appointed minister, introduced Bill C-300 to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board, the collective marketing tool. A section of the act specifies that a plebiscite must be held. The Conservatives did that, but they excluded some voters. Not all farmers had the right to vote. They fiddled with democracy to obtain the desired result. People, mainly wheat producers, were excluded from the plebiscite in order to obtain the desired result. But the Canadian Wheat Board, not to be out-manoeuvred, recently conducted its own plebiscite: 62% of western producers want to keep this collective marketing tool—the Canadian Wheat Board. All of a sudden the Conservative government refused to acknowledge these results because it was not the one that organized the referendum to its liking.

Government Orders

I also remember what happened with the bulk mailings, the ten percenters, that members can send to their ridings. Members of the Conservative Party flooded their ridings and others—we were allowed to do so at the time—with ten percenters on the referendum. The use of these ten percenters to campaign against the Canadian Wheat Board was rather questionable. Today, it is not surprising that the majority government is finally attaining its goal, that is deciding the fate of the Canadian Wheat Board as we know it today. That is what tonight's vote will prove unfortunately. The Conservatives have the right to do it. They are fixated on it; it is their ideology. They believe that there will be a mixed market, including the voluntary use of a new board.

I am pleased to be able to speak and give examples. Voluntary collective marketing was tested in Quebec in the 1990s. It did not work. Today, not all producers agree that collective marketing agencies are the best option for various sectors, particularly wheat and maple syrup in Quebec. However, they have decided to make use of collective marketing agencies. The majority of them are satisfied and feel that it is the best way for them to make a living from agriculture.

It is important that the House is aware of an important section of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Section 47.1 clearly states that farmers, the western producers of wheat and barley, must decide their own future. And I believe they did so during the referendum organized by the Canadian Wheat Board. Sixty-two per cent said they want to keep the single desk. But the government is not listening to them. It is even saying that since the majority of people in western Canada voted for Conservative members, it shows their desire to see the Canadian Wheat Board dismantled. We all know that democracy goes further than that.

•(1740)

The member who spoke before me mentioned it: people did not vote on just that one issue. A real plebiscite must be held in order to ensure that it is the people who decide whether or not to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

I rise as well today because members of the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec came to see us this week. They have been very clear about this from the outset. They continue to support western producers who want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

According to the UPA, the Canadian Wheat Board ensures that producers have a better and more equitable market return and that the supply of wheat to the agri-food industry is more predictable and stable. The UPA is also of the view that we cannot allow the Conservative government to destroy such an influential tool, one that creates more than 14,700 direct and indirect jobs, with spinoffs worth almost \$1 billion.

I, the member for Richmond—Arthabaska, am not the one saying so, but rather the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec, which is in constant contact with producers in other provinces, especially wheat and barley producers in western Canada.

I have been told that this issue does not affect us. However, I must say that the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec also supports the board. These people really do the same

work. These grain producers support producers who want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk system.

In the past, perhaps this issue did not really affect Quebec producers. However, the planned dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board has become problematic for us with the implementation, by the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec, of its own marketing agency for wheat for human consumption in Quebec. With this agency, the Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec is the only agent authorized to market all wheat for human consumption in Quebec. Its role is similar to that of the Canadian Wheat Board. This type of agency can exist because of the authority granted to producers' groups by the Quebec Act respecting the marketing of agricultural, food and fish products.

The Fédération des producteurs de cultures commerciales du Québec and the UPA are of course worried about what the Conservative government has in store for the Canadian Wheat Board, especially when other countries are constantly attacking our collective marketing tools such as the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management. I know the Conservative government does not like it when we draw a parallel between supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board, but they are both collective marketing tools that are constantly being attacked by other countries at the World Trade Organization. This is because those people want to negotiate their way into our market in order to sell their own products without any obstacles.

In light of what the Conservative government wants to do to the Canadian Wheat Board, there are also concerns in Quebec about the fate of supply management, which, I repeat, represents 40% of Quebec's farming economy. It is not insignificant.

Advisors to the current Prime Minister always said that if the Conservatives had a majority, they would attack the Canadian Wheat Board and supply management and implement a free market system.

In closing, we have to respect the true will of the farmers, wherever they are. I rise today on behalf of the farmers in Quebec who have told me they want western Canadian farmers to be respected and to be allowed to keep the Canadian Wheat Board.

•(1745)

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, given that the hon. member has been the vice-chair of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food for six years, can he explain to the House the advantages of a supply management system and collective marketing? That will help us understand the issues related to this bill a little bit better.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question.

Government Orders

I was saying that there is some concern, because losing the supply management system in Quebec is a big deal. Producers themselves decided that they wanted to set the prices and prevent certain imports, although a percentage of products can still cross our border, whether it be dairy products, poultry products or eggs.

However, the supply management system makes it possible to guarantee that producers will get a decent price and that there will be no unjustified fluctuations in price for consumers. This is a clear advantage over other countries that have abandoned the supply management system. I am thinking in particular of New Zealand, where there are huge fluctuations in prices and where everyone loses.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is going out of its way to claim that this bill is all about freedom.

My colleague made reference to how critical the supply management system is, much in the same way as the Canadian Wheat Board is. It protects industries in many different ways. It ensures a fair market price. It protects tens of thousands of jobs across the country.

This bill is not about freedom. This is about the impact the bill will have on the prairie farmer. Ultimately it is going to destroy family farms on the Prairies. It is going to hurt communities that rely on those small farms.

Does the member believe that this bill has anything to do with freedom as Conservative member after Conservative member claims?

[Translation]

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. He is well positioned to know the ins and outs of this issue concerning the Canadian Wheat Board because, if I am not mistaken, he is a member from the Winnipeg area, and the Canadian Wheat Board has its head office in Winnipeg.

One thing must be said about freedom: the one true freedom that western farmers should have in this is the freedom to choose what they want.

Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act is very clear: producers must have the last word, not the government, not the Prime Minister, not the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food. The farmers must be the ones to choose. If they decide they no longer want the Canadian Wheat Board, we, the Parliamentarians—including government members—must acquiesce.

But that is not the case. The only time the government wanted to organize a referendum, it did not allow farmers to vote. When the Canadian Wheat Board organized a referendum, the numbers were quite telling—and I someday hope to see these numbers in favour of Quebec sovereignty. Sixty-two per cent of western farmers decided that they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. That is their freedom of choice, their freedom of speech. That is what they want, and we must respect that.

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the bill because it is opening up

new opportunities for western Canadian wheat and barley farmers. That is good news, because there is a growing demand worldwide for the high quality grain they grow. As part of our commitment to help farmers make their money from the marketplace, we plan to deliver on our promise to provide marketing freedom to western Canadian grain farmers.

It is a matter of freedom, even if the opposition's numbers are used. If we have 40% of farmers not being able to sell their grain on the open market but are compelled to sell it to a board, it certainly curtails their freedom and right to do business as they see fit.

That is what the bill is all about. We are giving western Canadian wheat, durum and barley growers the same right to market their grain as enjoyed by farmers in other parts of Canada and around the world. It is remarkable that farmers only in western Canada would be compelled to sell to the Canadian Wheat Board when other farmers around the world and in this country are able to sell directly.

The fact is western Canadian grain farmers deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions, just as others do, including the right to market their own grain at the time of their choosing and to the buyer of their choice. Western Canadian farmers want this and so do three of four western provincial governments that produce almost 80% of the wheat and 90% of the barley that the Canadian Wheat Board markets.

As the Saskatchewan minister of agriculture has said, “Saskatchewan farmers spend their own hard-earned money on land, machinery and inputs to grow their own crops, so why should they not have the marketing freedom to decide how, when and to whom they sell their grain?” They invest thousands of dollars in machinery and equipment, hundreds of thousands of dollars in land, and they take all kinds of risks. They sell other commodities directly in the market, yet they are prevented from selling the grain they grow, except through the Wheat Board.

This legislation will open up a wealth of opportunity for western Canadian grain farmers for the future.

In my constituency there are a number of farmers who have written to me, and I will refer to a number of letters to make the point. They make the point for us as to why we should proceed with this legislation.

One farmer, Steve Blackmore of Ceylon, wrote:

I am pleased to see that the federal government continues with its move to introduce legislation to open up the marketing of grain and barley. My brother and I operate a farm in SE Sask [southeast Saskatchewan] with 5500 acres of cultivated land. We have limited our seeding of Durum and Barley in the past due to the involvement of the CWB [Canadian Wheat Board] and the intrusive nature of that relationship and the impact on farm cash flows by having to wait for pool returns to be calculated etc.

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Indeed, it is even a disservice to the Wheat Board to prohibit farmers from selling elsewhere. As this individual has indicated, he has cut back on the seeding of durum and barley and many have. Instead of seeded acres increasing for durum and barley, they have been regressing. Yet in other countries like Australia, we find that those acres have been improving after the farmers have been given the opportunity to market their own grain.

Mr. Blackmore went on to say, in referring to the durum crop:

As an example the Durum we grew in the fall of 2010 was all hauled in the fall of 2010 as it was great quality and provided blending opportunities for the grain company.

It is something that they could have got a premium for. He wrote:

We will not see our final return on that grain until December 2011 or January 2012.

Simply put, this is not acceptable. It is far too long to wait for the cash flow. It is far too long to wait for the price they ought to get.

He talked about the voting process. We have heard a lot in the House about the voting process and whether one should pay attention to that or not, but this is what he said:

I know you will have heard all the arguments on both sides of the debate and there is a lot of passion behind both sides however the voting process held by the CWB was a joke. Our operation received 4 votes, but really only one should be considered given that 90% of the volume would have gone through one permit book. I can only imagine that this is the case for lots of farmers. The argument about letting the farmers decide is the wrong debate, this is an open market debate and as a business owner...we need to have the ability to choose who we market our product through.

• (1750)

Whether a farmer runs a big or small operation, that farmer has had the opportunity to operate in the open market with respect to other commodities. As someone said here earlier, the sky is not falling in. Farmers have been able to do that successfully.

Mr. Blackmore wrote that he has been doing it already for years with canola, flax, lentils, peas, oats, fall rye, canary seed, and three varieties of mustard. It is something that farmers are accustomed to.

I grew up on a farm. My parents farmed four quarters and rented two for a total of six quarters. There were many small farmers around. Initially all they grew was wheat, barley and oats perhaps. It was only later in the process they experimented with new commodities like canola. They found they could market the canola and that they could get a cash price and sell it when they wanted to. They could wait for the price to go up if they wanted to wait. Some did better and others did not do as well, but they had the opportunity to do that.

Canola caught on and more of it was grown. Peas, lentils and other kinds of commodities that farmers have taken to have been sold and farmers have done very well with respect to those commodities. They would watch the markets and they would watch the price. They could decide what they wanted to plant.

Mr. Blackmore said that the value of changing to an open market solution will provide benefits for him and his farm operation. He said he would have the ability to contract price against a global benchmark and meet his cashflow needs. He would have the ability to negotiate based on quality and quantity at the grain companies. He would also be able to break down the barrier to cross-border shipping and provide new marketing opportunities.

Some of the best durum in the country, perhaps in the world, is grown in the southeast part of Saskatchewan in my riding. When we look at what the world price is compared to what farmers get, they cannot sell it all even at the price they can get. There is a significant difference so they have to take a loss.

The other thing Mr. Blackmore mentioned, as have other farmers, is the need for some certainty. That is why the opposition should get behind us and get this bill passed. He said:

As we look at the 2012 growing season we hope that the legislation is passed expeditiously this fall in order to allow for effective planning in terms of cropping options, implications of the change from the CWB, response by the market to a new offering, etc.

Farmers want to know what they are dealing with. They plan early for what they are going to put into their land for the next year. They want to see this legislation passed. I would urge all members to get behind the legislation to ensure it goes forward expeditiously.

Another person in my constituency wrote to the editor of *Lifestyles* on October 6, 2011. Amy Hewson from Langbank, Saskatchewan in my riding wrote:

I grew up on an 80 acre farm in central AB [Alberta]. ...I moved to my husband's 8000 acre farm in south east Saskatchewan....

My husband is a full time farmer; it's his business and his life. My Dad is an electrician and a farmer on the side who raises cattle and rents out his crop land, entitling him to vote.

That means her father's vote has the same weight as her husband's. The obvious point she is making is that it should not be so.

She said:

My husband and I are expecting a baby in January and we're both very excited to know that this child will grow up in a country where it's not a crime for his parents to sell their own wheat and barley as of August 1, 2012.

It is interesting to note that the member for Malpeque said farmers should be put in jail because they are crossing an international border. Imagine putting them in jail for selling their own produce, produce they have produced from their hard work, from their investment, their risk. It is incredible that we would even be having that debate in today's society.

Ms. Hewson said that it is not about getting rid of the CWB, it is about having a choice. That is an important point.

Marc Giraudier, another constituent, wrote to me saying that this is about choice and not about a vote. He wrote, "Regarding the plebiscite vote, take the outcome with a grain of salt, not all our farmers received a plebiscite vote and if a third option, dual market system had been a choice, the outcome would have been very different".

Government Orders

That is the truth. It is interesting that the opportunity to vote for a dual market system was not put forward by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Another interesting point is that one group of farmers, no matter the percentage, even if it was 62%, ought not to have the authority to ban or the power to prevent other individual producers from having the right to market their grain as they see fit.

•(1755)

If others want to sell through the Wheat Board, they can do so by simply uniting and pooling their resources together and going forward. They should proceed to do that.

•(1800)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Conservative MP after Conservative MP talks about the reduction in average acres and they try to blame the Canadian Wheat Board. As in many other things, they have absolutely no evidence, not a shred, to demonstrate that is the case. If anything, the CWB, and of course our good farmers, but the brand of CWB is one of the reasons that we sell the amount of wheat that we do, that we have the market we currently have.

I take exception to member after member quoting what individual farmers are saying. I want to refer to the broader picture. There were over 20,000 prairie grain producers and farmers who participated in the plebiscite. The government goes out of its way to discredit the plebiscite. Why does the government not have the political courage to have a plebiscite, if it is so critical of the one the CWB held? After all, there is an obligation in law to do so. Why does the member not support farmers having a legitimate plebiscite that they would actually abide by? We on this side would abide by the results. Why will the government not do the same?

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member was not listening when I read from the email from the farmer in Ceylon, Saskatchewan. He wrote:

We have limited our seeding of Durum and Barley in the past due to the involvement of the CWB and the intrusive nature of that relationship....

He went on to say what that was. The seeding acres have gone down, so they are doing themselves a disservice.

The Australian model shows that the seeding acreages have gone up and it is now producing 30% more wheat on average than it was before. It is marketing in 41 countries rather than 17 countries. That is what happens when farmers are given the option to go through the Canadian Wheat Board or otherwise.

With respect to the plebiscite itself, ballots were sent to more than 68,000 farmers when in fact there are about 20,000 commercial grain farmers. I do not know what that is about, but it says something about that process.

The Canadian Wheat Board was imposed on farmers to be compulsory whether they wanted to trade through it or not. There is a great percentage of farmers who did not want to belong to that system and they had no opportunity to do that because they would be jailed or fined. That is simply wrong. We do not need a plebiscite to see that. We do not need a plebiscite to say that we ought to give producers the ability to sell their product without having to pay a fine or go to jail for it. It was something that was imposed by a

government when it should not have been. It is time to get that wrapped up and changed once and for all.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the weekend I was at a function with real farmers who asked me when the government was going to change the Wheat Board so that they could sell their wheat and barley and not go to jail.

How does the member feel about farmers having to go to jail for selling the grain that they planted and harvested? One of my constituents did that and it was very difficult for him and his family.

Mr. Ed Komarnicki: Mr. Speaker, obviously I feel compassion for many of our farmers who grow wheat and durum and look at the world prices. They produce some of the best durum in the world, certainly in the country. They see the price and they are not able to sell it. There have been some who have taken matters into their own hands and have decided to cross the border, but as the member for Malpeque referred to that action, they were stopped and fined. They had to go through provincial court and the court of appeal. They spent a lot of dollars, but at the end of the day, they were not able to sell what they had produced themselves. It is remarkable that people in this country cannot do that.

Obviously I feel there is nothing wrong for those who would want to band together voluntarily to form a co-op, a corporation or association to market their grain together, but it is wrong to force people into that association when they do not want to be part of it. That is not the way to run a country. That is not the way to run a democracy and we need to change it now.

•(1805)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that we rise in this House on a regular basis to discuss bills and, more often than not, we do so following gag orders imposed by the government. This time, at issue is Bill C-18, which proposes that the Canadian Wheat Board be dismantled and that the single desk marketing of barley and wheat in Canada be eliminated. It was not that long ago that the government was trying to force Canada Post employees back to work. One might say that there is a fear of debate in this House. This is particularly unfortunate because we learn a lot by listening to what others have to say and we also learn a lot when we are able to thoroughly examine the provisions of bills, whether they are proposed by the government or by our colleagues here in the House.

However, people are being silenced rather quickly, not only in the House, but also in committee. Take, for example, Bill C-10, the government's omnibus bill on law and order. Witnesses might have plenty to say about this extremely long bill, but they are given only five minutes in which to do so and then they are cut off, once again, in mid-sentence. It does not seem as though democracy is being taken very seriously.

Government Orders

Nor does it seem as though the legislative provision calling for a plebiscite is being taken very seriously either. In other words, only the producers, the farmers, have the right to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board and it cannot be dismantled by us, here in the House, the very people who are supposed to uphold the law and ensure that things are done correctly. A vote was held. When I listen to the speeches given by members of all the parties, whether on the government side or this side of the House—with a few exceptions to my right—there are clearly huge differences in opinion.

From what I understand about this issue so far, we know very well that we have a Prime Minister who, since 2002, has been promising to dismantle the Wheat Board and, now that his party is in power, he has been quick to do so. I have often heard it said and I will say it again, since the Conservatives do not have very strong math skills: 39% of the population is not a strong mandate. In the current electoral system, it constitutes a majority, but it certainly does not constitute a strong mandate.

The government has to be careful about using such support to boast and say that the farmers it talks to or the farmers who talk to it all say it is doing the right thing. In actual fact, the Canadian Wheat Board held a plebiscite for which a total of 38,261 farmers mailed in their ballots. That is a participation rate of 56%, which is on par with federal elections, unfortunately, in my opinion. As I was saying at the beginning of my speech, 62% of the farmers voted for keeping a single desk marketing system for wheat and 51% for barley. I think 62% is a very good percentage. That is the rate with which I won my own election, so you can see why I like that very solid percentage so much.

That being said, it is not up to us in this House to decide on this. The act was drafted in such a way that it is the primary stakeholders who have a say. It is their Canadian Wheat Board. It is up to them to decide what to do with it.

Every speech I keep hearing about how the Wheat Board is not being eliminated, that it will be voluntary for a number of years, and that if people want to continue with it they will—it is all hogwash. It is a slow death, so as not to cause too much unrest. However, somehow, on the government side, no one is able to convince us in this House why this is necessary, other than for ideological reasons.

I have read up on the Canadian Wheat Board and I see how it succeeded—in regulating, perhaps. As a businessperson, I do find that regulations can be quite restrictive at times. In Quebec, we are used to having quite a lot of regulations and red tape. However, sometimes, to make systems work and ensure that everything is on the up and up, without losing control of an industry, that is what it takes and this is an industry that has been tried and tested.

• (1810)

This method has been proven over many years. The board should not be dismantled strictly on the basis of a poorly explained, unjustified ideology, without any figures to support the decision other than a few figures from emails here and there. I respect the fact that in a democracy, there will always be people who agree and people who do not agree. The members opposite may very well wonder who we are to talk, when agriculture is not the lifeblood of the riding of Gatineau, but the fact remains that this market affects every one of us.

The decisions we make here about how the market runs will affect everyone. If for no other reason, I think that that certainly gives us the right to speak to this issue.

I heard questions from some Conservative colleagues. They said to some colleagues from Ontario that their province had dismantled its board. Why should western farmers be treated differently than Ontario farmers? That could be a good question, but the fact is that Ontario farmers decided themselves, after a vote, to dismantle their board. I respect that. If western farmers tell us that they no longer want things to run like this, that is a different story. This board was created during wartime to provide wheat to Europe, among other places. Perhaps the board has no reason to exist in 2011. I do not know. The arguments that have been made by the minister and the Conservatives who have spoken on this issue have not convinced me, as the member for Gatineau, that there is a logical reason behind this that has nothing to do with ideology. Ideology is sometimes a bad adviser in a context like this.

I believe that the government would have our approval and the support of the entire House if it acted appropriately, that is, according to the terms of the act, which provides for a vote. Following a vote, we could decide whether or not the board would remain. No one would object. It would be the voice of democracy.

In this context, as the member for Gatineau, I personally find this problematic and it is for that reason that I will be voting against the bill. The Conservative government's actions are anti-democratic. It is no longer surprising. It is unfortunate. The government was only formed on May 2, 2011, and I am already forced to conclude that any type of organization, whether it is a union or the Canadian Wheat Board, is automatically on the Conservatives' chopping block. My concern is that we are selling our assets piecemeal to the Americans.

Matters such as those dealt with by Bill C-18 are very important because of the number of people affected directly or indirectly: consumers, producers, farmers, those involved in transportation, and all those who have anything to do with the wheat and barley industry. I believe we are entitled to expect a more responsible approach from parliamentarians.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 6:15 p.m., pursuant to order made Thursday, October 20, 2011, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the second reading stage of the bill now before the House.

• (1815)

[*English*]

The question is on the subamendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the subamendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the subamendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

•(1845)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negatived on the following division:)

(Division No. 42)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews	Adams
Ashton	Atamanenko	Albas
Aubin	Ayala	Alexander
Bellavance	Bennett	Allison
Benskin	Bevington	Ambrose
Blanchette-Lamothe	Boivin	Anderson
Borg	Boularicce	Ashfield
Boutin-Sweet	Brahmi	Bateman
Brosseau	Byrne	Bernier
Caron	Casey	Blaney
Cash	Charlton	Boughen
Chicoine	Chisholm	Breitkreuz
Choquette	Chow	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Christopherson	Cleary	Bruinooge
Coderre	Comartin	Calandra
Côté	Crowder	Cannan
Cullen	Cuzner	Carrie
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)	Chong
Day	Donnelly	Clement
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé	Davidson
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Del Mastro
Dusseault	Easter	Dreeshen
Eyking	Foote	Dykstra
Fortin	Freeman	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Garneau	Garrison	Fletcher
Genest	Genest-Jourdain	Gallant
Godin	Goodale	Goldring
Gravelle	Groguhé	Gosal
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)	Grewal
Hassania	Hsu	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hughes	Hyer	Hayes
Jacob	Julian	Hillyer
Karygiannis	Kellway	Hoepner
Lamoureux	Lapointe	James
Latendresse	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Liu	Kent
MacAulay	Martin	Komarnicki
Massé	Mathyssen	Lake
May	McCallum	Lebel
McGuinty	Michaud	Lemieux
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Lizon
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray	Lukiwski
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo	MacKay (Central Nova)
Pacetti	Papillon	Mayes
Patry	Péclét	Menegakis
Perreault	Pilon	Merrifield
Plamondon	Quach	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Rafferty	Ravignat	Norlock
Raynault	Regan	O'Neill Gordon
Rousseau	Sandhu	Oda
Savoie	Scarpaleggia	Opitz
Sellal	Sgro	Payne
Sims (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Poirievre
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis	Raitt
Sitsabaesan	Stoffer	Reid
Stewart	Thibeault	Richards
Sullivan		Ritz
		Schellenberger
		Shca
		Shory
		Sopuck
		Stanton
		Strahl
		Tilson
		Toews
		Trottier
		Tweed
		Valcourt
		Villacott
		Warawa
		Watson
		Weston (Saint John)
		Williamson
		Woodworth
		Young (Vancouver South)

NAYS

Members

Government Orders

Zimmer— 151

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

The next question is on the amendment.

[*English*]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I believe that you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with Conservatives voting no.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed

Ms. Chris Charlton: Mr. Speaker, NDP members will be voting yes.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour, including the member for Ottawa—Vanier.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: The Bloc Québécois is in favour of the amendment.

[*English*]

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I will be voting yes.

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 43)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews	Liu	MacAulay
Ashton	Atamanenko	Martin	Masse
Aubin	Ayala	Mathyssen	May
Bélanger	Bellavance	McCallum	McGuinty
Bennett	Benskin	Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Bevington	Blanchette-Lamothe	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Boivin	Borg	Murray	Nicholls
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet	Nunez-Melo	Pacetti
Brahmi	Brosseau	Papillon	Patry
Byrne	Caron	Péclét	Perreault
Casey	Cash	Pilon	Plamondon
Charlton	Chicoine	Quach	Rafferty
Chisholm	Choquette	Ravignat	Raynauld
Chow	Christopherson	Regan	Rousseau
Cleary	Coderre	Sandhu	Savoie
Comartin	Côté	Scarpalleggia	Sellah
Crowder	Cullen	Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
Cuzner	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Sor)	Sitsabaeasan
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day	Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stewart
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre	St-Denis	Sullivan
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Stoffer	Toone
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dussault	Thibeault	Trudeau
Easter	Eyking	Tremblay	Valerio— 118
Foote	Fortin	Turmel	
Freeman	Garnneau		
Garrison	Genest		
Genest-Jourdain	Godin		
Goodale	Gravelle		
Grogan	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)		
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia		
Hsu	Hughes		
Hyer	Jacob		
Julian	Karygiannis		
Kellway	Lamoureux		
Lapointe	Latendresse		
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)		

Ablonczy	Sitsabaeasan
Aglukkaq	Stewart
Albrecht	Sullivan
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Toone
Ambler	Trudeau
Anders	Valerio— 118
Armstrong	
Aspin	
Benoit	
Bezan	
Block	
Braid	
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	
Brown (Barrie)	
Butt	
Calkins	
Carmichael	
Chislu	
Clarke	
Daniel	
Dechert	
Devolin	
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	
Fast	
Flaherty	
Galipeau	
Goguen	
Goodyear	
Gourde	
Harper	
Hawn	
Hibbert	
Hoback	
Holder	
Jean	
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	
Kerr	
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	
Lauzon	
Leitch	
Leung	
Lobb	
Lunney	
MacKenzie	
McColeman	
Menzies	
Miller	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
O'Connor	
Obhrai	
Oliver	
Paradis	
Penashue	
Preston	
Rathgeber	

NAYS

Members

Adams	Adams
Albas	Alexander
Alderson	Allison
Ambrose	Anderson
Ashfield	Bateman
Bateman	Bernier
Bernier	Blaney
Boughen	Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Bruinooge	Calandra
Calandra	Cannan
Carré	Carrie
Chong	Clement
Clement	Davidson
Davidson	Del Mastro
Dreessen	Dykstra
Dykstra	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Fletcher	Fletcher
Gallant	Gallant
Goldring	Goldring
Gosal	Gosal
Grewal	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hayes	Hayes
Hillyer	Hillyer
Hoepner	Hoepner
James	James
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kent	Kent
Komarnicki	Komarnicki
Lake	Lake
Lebel	Lebel
Lemieux	Lemieux
Lizon	Lizon
Lukiwski	Lukiwski
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKay (Central Nova)
Mayes	Mayes
Menegakis	Menegakis
Merrifield	Merrifield
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Norlock	Norlock
O'Neill Gordon	O'Neill Gordon
Oda	Oda
Opitz	Opitz
Payne	Payne
Poirievre	Poirievre
Raitt	Raitt
Reid	Reid

Government Orders

Rempel	Richards	Clarke	Clement
Richardson	Ritz	Daniel	Davidson
Saxton	Schellenberger	Dechert	Del Mastro
Seebach	Shea	Devolin	Dreeshen
Shipley	Shory	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Smith	Sopuck	Fast	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Sorenson	Stanton	Flaherty	Fletcher
Storseth	Strahl	Galipeau	Gallant
Sweet	Tilson	Goguen	Goldring
Toet	Toews	Goodyear	Gosal
Trost	Trottier	Gourde	Grewal
Truppe	Tweed	Harper	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Uppal	Valcourt	Hawn	Hayes
Van Loan	Vellacott	Hiebert	Hillyer
Wallace	Warawa	Hoback	Hoepner
Warkentin	Watson	Holder	James
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)		Jean	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Weston (Saint John)	Williamson	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Wilks	Woodworth	Kerr	Komarnicki
Wong	Young (Vancouver South)	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Yelich		Lauzon	Lebel
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		Leung	Lizon
		Lobb	Lukiwski
		Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
		MacKenzie	Mayes
		McColeman	Menegakis
		Menzies	Mernfield
		Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
		Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
		O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
		Obhrai	Oda
		Oliver	Opitz
		Paradis	Payne
		Penashue	Poitrevre
		Preston	Raitt
		Rathgeber	Roid
		Rempel	Richards
		Richardson	Ritz
		Saxton	Schellenberger
		Seebach	Shea
		Shipley	Shory
		Smith	Sopuck
		Sorenson	Stanton
		Storseth	Strahl
		Sweet	Tilson
		Toet	Toews
		Trost	Trottier
		Truppe	Tweed
		Uppal	Valcourt
		Van Loan	Vellacott
		Wallace	Warawa
		Warkentin	Watson
		Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
		Weston (Saint John)	
		Wilks	Williamson
		Wong	Woodworth
		Yelich	Young (Vancouver South)
		Zimmer— 151	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the amendment lost.

[English]

The question is on the main motion.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, if you seek it, I believe you will find agreement to apply the vote from the previous motion to the current motion, with Conservatives voting yes.**The Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?**Some hon. members:** Agreed**Ms. Chris Charlton:** Mr. Speaker, NDP members will be voting no.**Ms. Judy Foote:** Mr. Speaker, Liberal members will be voting no.

[Translation]

Mr. Louis Plamondon: The Bloc Québécois will be voting no.**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** I will be voting no.

[English]

(The House divided on the motion which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 44)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chiszu	Chong

Allen (Welland)

Ashton
Aubin
Bélanger
Bennett
Bevington
Boivin
Boularice
Brahmi
Byrne
Casey
Charlton
Chisholm
Chow
Cleary
Comartin
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver East)
Donnelly

NAYS

Members

Andrews
Atamancenko
Ayala
Bellavance
Benskin
Blanchette-Lamothe
Borg
Boutin-Sweet
Brouseau
Caron
Cash
Chicoine
Choquette
Christopherson
Coderre
Côté
Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Day
Doré Lefebvre

Adjournment Proceedings

Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groulx	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hassainia
Hsu	Hughes
Hyer	Jacob
Julian	Karygiannis
Kellway	Lamoureux
Lapointe	Latendresse
LeBlanc (Beauséjour)	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Massé
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nicholls
Nuncz-Melo	Pacetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpalleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-sor)
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Sitsabaisan
St-Denis	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
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Turner	Valériot— 118

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to a legislative committee.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee.)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

* * *

● (1850)

[English]

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 19 I raised a question in the House with regard to processing EI claims. On that occasion, and subsequent occasions, the minister had indicated that the changes in the number of people processing EI claims was in part because there was a temporary spike in EI claims.

I want to refer to an article from October 20 in the *Vancouver Sun* that said the number of Canadians receiving EI surged in August according to Stats Canada. Across the country, the number of beneficiaries increased by 35,200 in August, up from 533,330 the month before. That is a 6.6% increase month over month.

The article went on to say that the number of initial and renewal claims rose by 4.4% across Canada, up 10,700 claims, for a total of 255,600 in August. That is the second consecutive monthly increase.

From Stats Canada's own numbers, it appears that it was not just a temporary spike that the EI claims processing folks were dealing with. In fact, what we are seeing is increasing numbers of claims.

In addition, I want to refer to how the department is spending some of its resources. Not only do we have these claims increasing but the department is spending resources on cases that have already been decided.

I specifically want to refer to the case of Jennifer McCrea, who was diagnosed with breast cancer while on maternity leave and was denied sickness benefits earlier this year. The Calgary mother applied for six weeks of benefits to recover from her double mastectomy, but she was turned down because she was not available for work. There was already a precedent setting case that had been decided by Justice J.R. Marin, who had ruled that legislative changes made nearly a decade ago were intended to give women access to sickness benefits regardless of whether it is before, during, or after the maternity leave. He said that a more liberal interpretation of the available for work regulation was required of the government, or the government had to update the legislation.

The article went on to say that the human resources minister had done neither. That means that each woman who is denied either walks away from the benefits she is entitled to or has to find a lawyer and re-fight a battle that has already been won.

It went on in the article, and this is the resource issue, to say that this ruling affects so few people, it is estimated between 3,000 and 4,000 a year, that it would probably cost the government more to fight the cases than if would to pay up. In his ruling, Judge Marin said that fixing the mess would not open the floodgates but would offer minimum comfort and solace to a small, hard hit sector of society.

The *Vancouver Sun* article said that the minister should immediately direct employment insurance officers to follow Marin's ruling and fix the legislation to ensure the changes stick.

What we have here is a case of increasing claims, the department spending resources fighting a case that has already been decided by the umpire, and one wonders whether that should be a priority. Therefore, I want to come back to my original question. Will the minister explain to out-of-work Canadians why the Conservatives are making it harder to access a program that Canadians have paid into?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to respond to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan and her concerns about providing services to out-of-work Canadians.

Canadians gave the government a strong mandate to complete Canada's economic recovery and to return to balanced budgets. That is what we are doing. Our Conservative government is committed to delivering the highest quality service in a way that is effective, efficient and focused on the needs of Canadians.

Adjournment Proceedings

The hon. member raises concerns about dealing with backlogs in employment insurance. That is precisely why we are taking steps to improve processes and modernize the delivery of EI to Canadians.

First, it is important to note that no Service Canada centres are closing as a result of these measures. In-person services will not be affected. We are introducing a new service delivery model over the next three years that will include the processing of EI claims at 22 sites across the country. Through technological advancements, Service Canada is modernizing the delivery of one of the federal government's cornerstone social services.

Historically, the EI claims process was designed and administered as an entirely paper based program. By increasing automation, we are making it easier for Canadians to receive information and services from government when and how they need them.

The Service Canada office in my area of Collingwood benefits tremendously from these reforms that our government is moving forward on. The hard-working employees at our office work with the constituents and are utilizing Collingwood's Service Canada office to ensure that there are faster and more efficient services provided to our citizens in Simcoe Grey.

Canadians expect their hard-earned tax dollars to be used as effectively and efficiently as possible. The Government of Canada is working hard, on behalf of Canadians, to eliminate the deficit while improving services we deliver.

•(1900)

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, those words are cold comfort to Canadians waiting to receive payment for their EI claims.

I want to reiterate that according to Statistics Canada, in August we actually saw a surge in claims. In fact, when we are talking about renewal claims, that was the second month in a row that the claims increased. In addition, I mentioned the sickness benefit appeal, which was to supposedly spur an EI legislative review; instead, what we have is another claimant who has once again been denied sickness benefits.

I come back to the question that we still do not have an answer to: when will the Conservative government explain to Canadians why it is making it harder to access a program that Canadians paid into?

We have the case of maternity and sickness benefits. We have the case of Canadians who are applying and waiting inordinate amounts of time to receive payment. I am sure Canadians would be very interested in that answer.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, we have already achieved administrative savings of almost 30% through the modernization of the delivery of EI. Additional savings of up to 15% are possible through more efficient processing of EI claims. Our goal is to expand the automated processing of claims from the current 44% to 70% over the next three years.

A workforce management strategy is in effect to assist with planned personnel changes. This will include attrition, reassessments, and training. All changes will occur within the parameters of the collective agreements.

These are challenging times. Our government is working on behalf of Canadians to eliminate the deficit while improving service delivery to Canadians.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is growing concern about the government's lack of interest in protecting the environment. Bold claims should be matched by bold actions. Instead, we are seeing cuts that will cripple important environmental monitoring capabilities.

On September 15, I first implored the environment minister to reconsider planned cuts to ozone research. Since then, opposition members have repeatedly asked questions during question period, to which the environment minister and his parliamentary secretary have often responded by changing the subject. On Friday, questions about greenhouse gas emissions were met with a diatribe about shipbuilding, Supreme Court justices and the Wheat Board.

We can and should be doing better in addressing the legitimate concerns of Canadians regarding environmental monitoring programs needed to protect health and safety.

The known facts are that the scientists responsible for the ozonesonde network and the World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre have received letters saying their jobs are in danger. Even the assistant deputy minister has told reporters that budget cuts being implemented will mean that the ozone monitoring network will be reduced.

Claims in the House that there will be no cuts to ozone monitoring do not stand up to these truths.

When will the government rescind the letters to these scientists so that they can continue work we all agree is valuable and necessary?

My party has now undertaken an online petition to stop the cuts to ozone research. It has over 3,000 signatures from concerned citizens across Canada and is growing in number by the day.

I must now ask again, on behalf of those thousands of Canadians: when will the government rescind the letters to these scientists?

In a week, I will be hosting leading experts in atmospheric research here on Parliament Hill to talk to members of Parliament and senators about ozone depletion and Canada's leadership role in ozone research. I implore members of the government to attend, listen, and ask questions. Sound policy on the environment is informed by science.

Adjournment Proceedings

After word leaked of the cuts to ozone research, Conservatives started a campaign to track down the source of the leak and muzzle scientists. Since October 3, I have been asking that the government unmuzzle Dr. Tarasick, a senior scientist at Environment Canada, and allow him to speak of the discovery of the 2,000,000-square-kilometre ozone hole published in the prestigious journal *Nature*.

For 19 days, the government prevented Dr. Tarasick from talking about his own work to the media. We can and should be doing better at giving Canadians timely access to the science they have paid for.

Dr. Tarasick was finally allowed to speak on October 21. However, before the interview started, Environment Canada tried to limit the interview topics, telling Postmedia News that Dr. Tarasick would not answer questions about the impact of potential cuts to the ozone monitoring network. Although Dr. Tarasick was allowed to speak, it was clear he was not doing so freely. The public has a right to know the impact of cuts on the ozone monitoring program. There is no need to hide from the truth.

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the contributions that Environment Canada scientists make to independent studies and policy development and to protecting Canada's environment.

Contrary to what the opposition would like to have this House believe, Environment Canada is more than committed to ensuring the continued engagement of stakeholders in international regulatory policy processes. We are strongly committed to protecting Canada's natural heritage, even in difficult economic times.

We are also committed to ensuring hard-earned taxpayer dollars are spent wisely, which is in stark contrast to how the opposition would have us proceed. That is why we are reviewing government spending commitments on a regular cycle to ensure they are effective and efficient, respond to the core priorities of the Canadian government and are in line with our federal responsibilities.

With regard to ozone, our government is strongly committed to protecting Canada's environment, as I have said. That is why our plan is to ensure that Canada's strong track record in the area of atmospheric ozone measurement continues to deliver sound science within budget.

As we have said repeatedly in this House, we will continue to both effectively and efficiently monitor ozone. The World Ozone and Ultraviolet Radiation Data Centre, which is considered to be world class, will continue to operate.

As well, we will continue to effectively and efficiently make best use of taxpayer dollars.

Ms. Kirsty Duncan: Mr. Speaker, the government is cutting ozone science and has muzzled scientists. Dr. Tarasick explained during the interview that the monitoring network already has limited resources for maintaining the existing quality of data collected and used in the recent *Nature* study. He also said, "If the taxpayer in his infinite wisdom were to give 10 times the budget I have now, I think I could use all that money quite usefully and do good science with it. I don't think we're wasting a penny".

Moreover, he indicated that the warning about his job was not rescinded.

Dr. Tarasick also said, "Well, I'm available when media relations says I'm available. I have to go through them".

The Prime Minister's government introduced new rules to control interviews with journalists by Environment Canada scientists in 2007, resulting in an 80% drop in media coverage of climate change science.

•(1905)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, since there were so many things in that question, I will stick to the question asked about ozone science. I want to make this crystal clear. Repeating what we have said over and over again, Canada has banned ozone-depleting chemicals. We will continue to monitor the ozone, and the ozone data centre will continue to operate.

I would like to ask the member opposite to support our plan to continue to monitor ozone. It is focused on ensuring Canada's excellent track record in this area is maintained in a cost-effective and efficient way.

VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs for being here this evening for what will no doubt be a completely non-partisan and transparent response to my question.

The issue brought to the House this evening for debate relates to the glaring disparity in support for our veterans when it comes to their funeral costs. For the record, a veteran receives about \$3,600 to help cover the cost of a funeral, while a member of the Canadian Forces receives about \$13,000, a very significant gap. I have written to the minister about this issue and have asked questions in the House in both official languages. The minister has not responded to my letter. The response from the minister in question period has, unfortunately, been evasive and dismissive and I, perhaps naively, hope for a more direct response this evening.

The government likes to talk about patriotism and wrap itself in the flag, and it loves to attend ceremonies honouring veterans, but consider this. I would ask the parliamentary secretary to reflect on this: her government spent millions of dollars last year on communications, photo ops, backdrops and the like, all the while contemplating massive cuts of about \$226 million for the department. There are millions for the spin machine and propaganda, yet the Conservatives refuse to commit to fixing the funeral cost inequity between our veterans and the Canadian Forces.

Adjournment Proceedings

Last Friday, late Friday afternoon in fact, the government announced that there would be \$226 million in cuts to Veterans Affairs. Upon receiving that news, I immediately gave a 48-hour notice of motion to the Veterans Affairs committee that it suspend its work on commemorating veterans and immediately begin an examination of the impact of the cuts on veterans and those who provide those services.

That notice of motion was provided to the committee. When I arrived at the committee meeting, I found that the notice of motion had been pushed to the bottom of the agenda without me knowing about it and was scheduled to be in camera. I advised the chair upfront that was not acceptable. At my first opportunity in the meeting, I presented the motion and it passed. Unfortunately the story has been that the motion passed because some Conservatives came late. The story should be that the Conservatives tried to defeat a motion that called for transparency with respect to veterans' benefits and failed.

My question for the parliamentary secretary is fairly straightforward. It is the same one I asked, in both languages, of the minister. Will the department commit to treat veterans fairly and on level ground with members of the Canadian Forces? Given that the question will simply require a yes or no answer, perhaps she could take the time to address the other questions arising out of the motion before the committee. Will the minister show up, will the committee neuter the effects of the motion, will it limit the study and does the government believe in transparency within the Department of Veterans Affairs?

• (1910)

[Translation]

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to point out to the hon. members present that this government takes the dignity of Canadian veterans very seriously.

[English]

As the minister mentioned in his response to the member, the Department of Veterans Affairs works closely with the last post fund, which delivers the program on its behalf. It works hard to ensure funeral and burial assistance is offered to veterans who have died from injuries related to their service, regardless of their rank or the medals they have received. Help is also available to ensure veterans without the financial resources for a dignified burial and funeral are provided with one. We will continue working with the last post fund and exploring other ways to provide quality services to our veterans.

[Translation]

This, and many other matters, is highly important to the government. The significant improvements made to the new veterans charter that came into effect recently will help the thousands of soldiers who, because of the severity of their injuries or other problems, need more financial assistance.

[English]

We have established a minimum pre-tax income of \$40,000 a year for ill or injured veterans while they are in rehabilitation or until the age of 65 years if they are not able to be suitably and gainfully employed.

We have also enhanced access to the monthly allowances available under the Pension Act and the new veterans charter to seriously injured or ill veterans. By the way, these monthly allowances are up to \$1,631 a month, payable for life.

We have also added a new \$1,000 monthly supplement to the permanent impairment allowance to help our most seriously injured or ill veterans who are unable to be suitably or gainfully employed. This supplement is payable for life and, when combined with other enhancements that I have mentioned, ensures that our most seriously injured men and women receive a minimum income of \$58,000 each year.

Also, we have created flexible payment options for veterans and Canadian Forces members who are receiving a disability award. The disability award recognizes and compensates for the pain and suffering of an injury or illness. With these new enhancements, recipients can choose to receive the disability award in a lump sum payment, in annual instalments or some combination thereof. We are giving our veterans the right to choose.

These actions prove that our government cares for the health and well-being of our veterans.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, that was an excellent speech outlining the programs that the government has set out but there is still no answer to my question.

It is a fairly simple question. Will the government equalize the amount that is afforded for funerals of veterans with Canadian Forces members? The parliamentary secretary indicated that they work with the last post fund. What she did not indicate is that the government provides \$3,600 to the last post fund as compared to the \$13,000 for Canadian Forces members.

Could I please have an answer to my question? I have now asked the minister twice. The parliamentary secretary had four minutes and did not give me a yes or no answer.

The other three questions remain unanswered, as well. Will the minister show up to the committee? Will the committee obstruct the motion that has been passed? Does the government believe in transparency with respect to the cuts to the Veterans Affairs' budget?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to veterans' benefits, we have been very clear in this chamber. In fact, last Friday, I took two questions. I believe the House leader took a question. We could not have been more crystal clear. We will sustain benefits to our veterans. Clearly, quite simply.

There were some other questions about funeral and burial assistance. Just to reiterate, those assistance programs are provided to veterans with service-related injuries who need it the most, regardless of their military rank or any decorations they have received.

Adjournment Proceedings

We will continue to work with our stakeholders to respond to their priorities and their concerns. Our government is committed to meeting the needs of our veterans and their families by giving them the care, the services and the financial support they deserve.

I do not think we could be any clearer that, over the last 60 years, no government has done more for our veterans than our Conservative government.

• (1915)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before we finish up, I just want to convey to hon. members that, during the adjournment

proceedings, members are welcome to take a seat anywhere in the chamber that suits them. I realize it is a habit that they speak from their appointed seat but during adjournment proceedings members are welcome to sit where they please.

[*Translation*]

The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:15 p.m.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 036 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, October 25, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, October 25, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 115 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 115—**Ms. Françoise Boivin:**

With regard to the government's support of social partnerships, as outlined on page 132 of Budget 2011: (a) what actions will the government take to support social partnerships in Canada and to address local issues; (b) what federal departments and stakeholders will be engaged as part of the government's development of plans to support social partnerships; (c) what private sector stakeholders will be consulted as part of the process; and (d) how much money has been allocated for the work of the Task Force on Social Finance from April 1, 2011 through April 1, 2014?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with regard to (a), the June 3, 2011, budget recognized that social partners, such as businesses and charities, are working together to develop innovative ways to address local challenges such as homelessness and persistent unemployment.

Recognizing that often the “best solutions to tackling these difficult problems are found locally”, the Government of Canada committed in this budget to “take steps to complement community efforts by encouraging the development of government/community partnerships, enabling communities to tackle local challenges and testing new approaches to improve performance”.

Moving forward, the Government of Canada is exploring these new approaches and ways to foster more effective partnerships that would help to streamline the management of grants and contribu-

tions, reduce red tape for community organizations, support social innovation, and ensure a focus on results in addressing persistent social challenges. Examples of how Human Resources and Skills Development Canada programs support social partnerships include the following:

In January 2011, the Prime Minister announced the creation of the Prime Minister's Volunteer Awards to recognize the exceptional contributions of volunteers, local businesses and innovative not-for-profit organizations in improving the well-being of families and their communities.

Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is providing support to partners Volunteer Canada and Manulife Financial to create a pan-Canadian web-based volunteer matching service that links volunteers with opportunities in their communities.

With regard to (b), Human Resources and Skills Development Canada is the lead on the social partnerships file. Consultations have begun within the federal government, and Human Resources and Skills Development Canada has met with officials from the Public Health Agency of Canada, Industry Canada, the Canada Revenue Agency, Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, Finance Canada, Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada and Public Safety Canada.

Provinces, measurement experts and literacy and essential skills experts will continue to be engaged by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada to address literacy and essential skills challenges for Canadian adults.

With regard to (c), various social partnership projects are planning to undertake stakeholder consultation in addition to preparing to issue calls and requests for proposals.

With regard to (d), the government has not allocated money for the work of the Task Force on Social Finance.

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Points of Order***POINTS OF ORDER**

BILL C-317—INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the point of order raised by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh regarding my private member's bill, Bill C-317. The thrust of the argument was that my bill would do something that only the government is allowed to do.

The history behind this is that, within our parliamentary system of democracy, only ministers of the day have the authority to propose new taxes. Before they are allowed to propose a tax, they must bring forward a ways and means motion to notify the House of Commons of their intention.

At page 900 of the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, it states:

The House must first adopt a ways and means motion before a bill which imposes a tax or other charge on the taxpayer can be introduced. Charges on the people, in this context, refer to new taxes, the continuation of an expiring tax, an increase in the rate of an existing tax, or an extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayers.

Thus, this has been a limitation on the use of private member's bills.

No one is suggesting that Bill C-317 proposes a new tax, or is the continuation of an expiring tax, or an increase in the rate of an existing tax. The member is only trying to object to my bill on the grounds that it is the repeal of an existing alleviation of taxation and an extension of a tax to persons who are not already taxpayers. In other words, a new class of taxpayer.

If that were the case, then he would be correct to suggest that the bill be discharged. However, my colleague has read more into my bill than actually exists. He is mistaken because he fails to recognize the limited purpose and effect of the bill, which is to simply require more complete and public disclosure of a union's finances on a regular basis.

First, his assertion that the bill “repeals the existing alleviation of tax” is incorrect. The bill does not remove any tax deduction. Bill C-317 maintains the status quo and does not grant the Canada Revenue Agency any powers, including any taxation powers, that it does not already have. The CRA is already empowered to compel financial disclosure. It can do so as a result of its mandate to ensure that organizations with tax exempt status do not engage in activities that would no longer justify that status. This power, the power it already has, is a simple function of its mandate to ensure compliance with the Income Tax Act. It is a mandate that the CRA exercises in respect of all classes of taxpayers who must comply with the act.

It is true that the bill would change things. The failure to comply with the additional disclosure proposed by the bill could also result in a union losing its tax exempt status. However, this loss of tax exempt status would result from the already existing enforcement provisions of the Income Tax Act and not from any provision contained in Bill C-317.

In other words, if a union violates the current requirement to disclose, the CRA can remove its tax exempt status. That is true whether my bill passes or not. All my bill would do is increase the

quantity and public nature of that disclosure with the same enforcement authority that the CRA already has.

My colleague also raised the issue of my bill creating a “new class of taxpayer”. According to the Income Tax Act, the term “taxpayer” is defined to include “any person whether or not liable to pay tax”. Even if an individual earns no income, he or she is still a taxpayer. However, the class contemplated in the member's unlikely example of a labour organization that chose to violate the Income Tax Act already exists. This existing class is the class of taxpayers who pay union dues. He is trying to pretend that the class is those who are in one tax bracket or another and who may change their tax bracket and tax payable as a result of a union losing its tax exempt status.

In the context of the loss of dues deductability, differentiating on the basis of income tax brackets is irrelevant to identifying a class of taxpayer. In fact, those who are affected by the loss of the union's tax exempt status have only one thing in common: they are a single class of taxpayers under the Income Tax Act who pay union dues.

•(1010)

The legislation only has the potential to affect this already existing class of taxpayers. Their tax bracket does not matter. The point is their loss of dues deductability. That is their class and it is an already existing class. Whether they pay more or less tax as a result of rulings by the CRA is a function of the CRA's normal day-to-day operations, not the result of this bill. In other words, this class of taxpayers is already subject to fluctuations in the level of taxation to which it may be subject under the current legislation and CRA's interpretations and administration of the act.

I have one more point to make in response to my colleague's point of order. He claimed that the ruling in Bill C-470 from the 40th Parliament should be distinguished from this case because union members would be obligated to pay dues while charitable donations are discretionary. Even if it is accepted that the bill may have the effect claimed by my colleague, and I do not concede that it would, it must be pointed out that union members whose union has lost its tax exempt status for refusing to disclose have the right to exercise certain options. Those options include the option to be represented by another union, a union that has maintained its tax exempt status. This would serve to ensure that member dues continue to be eligible for a tax deduction. Therefore, the ruling in Bill C-470 is a relevant precedent to be relied upon on this particular point.

Those points conclude my response to the point of order raised by the member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

The Speaker: I thank the member for his comments. I can assure the House that I will take this matter under advisement and will come back to the House in due course.

The hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like the opportunity to consider the member's argument. I am not prepared to do that at this point. I am not likely to want to submit anything further since the argument that we heard from the member had so little merit. However, just in case, I would like to review it and I will get back to you, Mr. Speaker, within 24 hours.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

● (1015)

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards; and recognizing this right, the House calls on the government to set aside its legislation abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk and to conduct a full and free vote by all current members of the CWB to determine their wishes, and calls on the government to agree to honour the outcome of that democratic process.

She said: It is an honour to stand here today and present our opposition day motion on the Canadian Wheat Board. I would like to point out that the motion is seconded by the member for Welland.

Every so often we have a chance to debate a defining issue. Today we have that chance. Today's motion that we are debating is about what Canadians want. It is about imagining a Canada, a Canada that we have had up to now which in some ways and in some sectors has been shaped by those at the very core of that same sector. Today we are also debating about a Canada that has been shaped by an ideological agenda which is at risk of being further shaped by that agenda against the interests of Canadians and those who are at the very core of that economy, of that sector, of that livelihood we are debating today.

Over the last number of days we have been debating the government's steadfast agenda to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. In doing so, we have talked about a contrast of visions, one that would take Canada back in time and one that would move us forward.

Many decades ago the Canadian Wheat Board was developed at the wish of farmers. Farmers saw the way in which private companies, often not based in western Canada, profited from their hard work and left them little in return. Farmers knew that during times of economic downturn survival meant pulling together. Moving forward meant working together. Together they developed one of the most successful marketing entities in our country.

The Wheat Board developed into far more than a marketing board. It became part of developing and selling the best wheat in the world, Canadian wheat. For decades the Canadian Wheat Board has worked with farmers and entities such as the Canadian Grain Commission to develop a top Canadian brand for export. That brand has belonged not to the Canadian Wheat Board; it has belonged to Canadian farmers. It has belonged to all of us.

I remember visiting the offices of the Canadian Wheat Board in Winnipeg on a few occasions. I saw the dozens of products that we as Canadians export to countries around the world, the products we contribute in terms of producing the final product, from pasta to rice to flour. The hard work of Canadian farmers has reached a level of reputation and is a guaranteed product from which we as Canadians have benefited. That top quality and that top brand has been a source of pride for all Canadians.

The Wheat Board though is more than a single desk. It represents the idea that those who produce the final product ought to have a say in the production. They ought to have a say in the future of their livelihoods. While the running of the Wheat Board has been shaped essentially by farmers, since 1998, 10 out of the 15 directors on the board have been elected by farmers themselves. Farmers have been in the driver's seat of an institution that works on their behalf. We have all benefited as a result of farmers guiding the Wheat Board. As farmers have prioritized the development of the best product in the world, Canada has benefited. As farmers have sought to maximize efficiency and cost savings, transportation routes across the Prairies, including in my home region, such as the Hudson Bay Line, and hubs such as the port of Churchill in my constituency have been utilized. As farmers have sought to create a system whereby stability is sought in an economy of increased uncertainty, farming families have benefited. As the Wheat Board has maximized the returns to farmers, rural communities and urban centres across western Canada have seen results.

Today that reality and that vision are at risk of disappearing. What has taken farmers decades to develop is at risk of being destroyed in a few short weeks, not by big corporations, not by another country, but by our very own government. A government that has claimed to stand for rural and western Canada threatens to bring it down.

● (1020)

The government's agenda on the Wheat Board is profoundly undemocratic. It is ignoring farmers' voices every step of the way. Where is the respect toward the directors of the Wheat Board, those who were elected by farmers, eight out of ten of whom were elected on a pro single desk position? Where is the respect for the plebiscite which indicated that a majority of farmers support the single desk marketing of wheat and barley? Finally, where is the duty of the government to follow section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act, which states that any proposed changes to the Wheat Board's marketing structure ought to be put to farmers for a vote?

That is what we in the NDP are asking for today, that prairie farmers be the ones to have a say in their future and that the government respect farmers' democratic right to speak. As the current chair of the Wheat Board, farmer Allen Oberg, has said, the government's agenda is not about giving farmers choice, but ignoring the choices they have already made.

Members across in recent days have used the word "freedom". My question is, what about farmers having the freedom to decide their own destiny? What about the freedom to have their democratic vote, as seen through the plebiscite, be respected? What about the freedom to say that they are opposed to the government's agenda in dismantling the Wheat Board?

The irony is that the same government has not been up front or consistent in talking to farmers. Some might call it a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde approach.

Business of Supply

Recently, there was a federal election. We know for a fact that during the campaign many Conservative candidates did not speak about the Wheat Board. The subject was not in their material. If anything, they told a different story in person. There was a very vocal Conservative candidate in Churchill who mentioned a number of issues, but certainly did not mention the Wheat Board. That candidate certainly did not mention what the loss of the Wheat Board would mean to the community of Churchill, whose port depends 95% on the grain product that comes through the Canadian Wheat Board.

What kind of transparency was offered to people across the Prairies as they voted on May 2? Not only was it not made clear in the campaign what the government's agenda would be, but in some instances candidates actually served to hide their message. At a March agricultural forum in Minnedosa, Manitoba, hosted by the member of Parliament for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food told those gathered that the Conservatives "respected the vote of farmers". He told the crowd, "Until farmers make that change, I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily." He was also quoted as saying that the farmers "are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too."

Just a few short months ago, this is what the very people who will be most impacted heard from the very Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food who today is turning his back on his commitment. Quite frankly, he is turning his back on democracy. How could the Conservatives possibly have one story during the election and a few short months later have a completely different story? This is also reason for concern in terms of what losing the Wheat Board will mean for the rest of our country, what it will mean for losing marketing structures, what it will mean for losing economic structures that put producers at the centre, and what it will mean not just for the west but for the whole country.

• (1025)

In my home region the Freshwater Fish Marketing Board is an important board that works hard on behalf of fishers in northern Manitoba and across western Canada. If this is the government's agenda on the Wheat Board, will it be the government's agenda when it comes to freshwater fish?

What about the kind of marketing structures on which people in other regions of Canada have been calling for protection?

[Translation]

I would like to underscore the message shared by a number of my colleagues from Quebec: supply management is an extremely important principle when it comes to developing the rural economy and Quebec's economy in general. Does this government also have an agenda for supply management? Even though today the government claims that it is not talking about abolishing it, it has been saying the same thing about the Canadian Wheat Board for months. It says that it will listen to what the farmers have to say. Does the same go for farmers in Quebec and Ontario? Is this only for prairie farmers? We would like to truly understand this government's logic.

[*English*]

If the government is not listening to farmers and is telling a different story on different occasions, then who is it listening to?

Many have said that those who stand to gain the most are the corporations, players such as Cargill, Viterra, Bunge and others that have been involved with agriculture all along. Profit is the bottom line of these corporations, not maximizing the return to farmers, the well-being of rural communities or ensuring that transportation networks across the Prairies are used in the most cost-effective way for farmers and the overall economy.

In a press release dated May 11, 2011, it is noted:

The Canadian government should give the grain industry at least six months to adjust before ending the Canadian Wheat Board's grain monopoly, the chief executive of Cargill's...Canadian subsidiary said on Wednesday.

A good time for the change, which would allow Western Canada's farmers to sell their wheat and barley to anyone they choose instead of just the Wheat Board, would be Aug. 1, 2012, which starts the 2012/13 marketing year—

That happens to be the same timeline the government has chosen. The exact message of Cargill Canada is the Conservative government's message to us as Canadians. Who is making those decisions and in whose interests are those decisions being made?

I would like to reference a letter to the editor wherein one prairie farmer talked about his concern with regard to the story that came out that the grain firm, Bunge, welcomes an end to the Wheat Board. Mr. Don Dutchak mentioned:

Among his egregious opinions, [the CEO] remarks that other countries have eliminated board trade because "it's not always well managed."

The Auditor General of Canada and 14 international trade investigations of the Canadian Wheat Board would all beg to disagree. Report after report has spoken of the stellar management of the Canadian Wheat Board not only for the way in which it operates and prioritizes farmers but also for its transparency and accountability. However, that is not the story we are hearing from the corporations that are interested in what will be left when the Wheat Board is gone.

Economist Murray Fulton said that the loss of the CWB's single desk would make the Canadian system more like that in the U.S. where the grain company and railroad competition would fall, the current freight revenue cap would disappear and less value would be returned to farmers. He also said that the changes would be irreversible.

Mark Sandilands of the *Lethbridge Herald* pointed out that once the Wheat Board is gone, "We can imagine a modern feudal system with farmers at the mercy of multinational corporations who'll decide what to grow and how much to grow".

The National Farmers Union stated:

Ending the single desk authority of the CWB...would transfer wealth created by Canadian farmers to big private, often foreign-owned grain companies instead of being returned to farmers and spent in their communities.

According to agricultural economist Richard Gray at the University of Saskatchewan, the winners are the big grain handlers. He states:

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...big grain handlers such as Cargill, Viterra and Bunge should end up better off. They will face a huge new supply of sellers competing to unload their product and make money off the marketing margin, or difference between the purchase and resale price.

The control these corporations will have will not only set farmers back but will also seek to destroy the reputation Canada has for growing the best quality wheat in the world.

As was pointed out, the Canadian system of seed registration to outward inspection of a vessel is an expensive system that farmers pay for. However, it is worth it because a higher percentage of the world market for both high quality and regular grain is captured because of that consistent quality. That means more money and more sales for western producers.

• (1030)

We cannot compete on volume or price because of our landlocked position and high transportation costs so quality is essential. Donna Welke, former assistant commissioner for Saskatchewan with the Canadian Grain Commission pointed out that producers know that and so do our competitors. She noted that it is in the interest of the United States to blend down our quality to get a competitive advantage for its corporations.

The question that remains is how the government, which has many members who were elected in western Canada and which claims to stand up for rural Canada, can in good conscience say that it is acting in the best interests of farmers when we know by looking at the case of the Australian Wheat Board that it is the corporations that will gain. The farmers will lose in an increasingly insecure economy. The brand we have invested in and have developed over decades will suffer. Our rural communities and regions like western Canada, as well as other regions where people are concerned about the potential risk it would pose to the marketing structures in other parts of the country, will suffer.

How can the government dismiss these facts? How can it stand in opposition to the idea that farmers should be deciding their destiny?

I would also make reference to the level of extreme arrogance we have seen from government members on this issue. As a western Canadian, I am profoundly disturbed by the way in which they claim to know what western Canadians think about and what their interests are with regard to the Wheat Board while all the time they ignore the result of the plebiscite. They make statements such as those made by the Prime Minister regarding the train barrelling down on the Wheat Board or such as that made by the Minister of Agriculture about blowing out the candles.

We know that this kind of arrogance does not go over well in western Canada. We have seen it before with the Mulroney government where in the end it had no seats left in western Canada because people supported the idea of a democratic voice and the need for people at the grassroots level to be heard. It is the kind of arrogance that claims the government knows better with regard to our future.

In closing, as a young Canadian and someone who comes from the west what concerns me the most is what this means for our future. I would like to quote from a letter written to CBC's *As it Happens* by Sid Stevenson. He said:

As a 24 year old, 5th generation Manitoba wheat grower, I feel compelled to respond to your interview with...[the] Minister of Agriculture.

He went on to say:

Farmers are perfectly capable of determining the marketing system we want. The majority has decided in favour of the CWB, so why is the government not supporting our decision.

• (1035)

The Deputy Speaker: Perhaps the hon. member can complete her comments during questions and comments.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's speech. She spoke a lot about democracy and respecting democracy. However, she has unfortunately completely misrepresented the debates of the last election campaign.

The NDP made a promise during the last election campaign. It stated:

We will support the Canadian Wheat Board as the single desk marketer for Canadian wheat and barley.

That was the NDP's promise on page 16 of its platform.

The Conservative Party's promise on page 59 of its platform stated:

We will continue to work with Western Canadian grain farmers to ensure that the results of the barley plebiscite are respected and that they are given the freedom to choose whether to sell grain on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board.

These were very clear promises. Of the 56 members of Parliament who were elected in western Canada in the last election, 51 are Conservative, 3 are NDP and 2 are Liberal members.

I ask the hon. member why does she not respect the democratic results of the May 2 election?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, we are talking about the future of the Canadian Wheat Board and the plebiscite contained within the act which would allow farmers to be heard with regard to the future of the Wheat Board. As for the May 2 election, as has been pointed out by many people who were campaigning on the ground, that was not about the Wheat Board. In fact, the Minister of Agriculture is on record telling people in Minnedosa, Manitoba, a region that is now represented by a Conservative member, that he will respect the democratic right of farmers to vote.

Therefore, my question for the government members is what are they so afraid of? Why will they not follow the act? Why will they not allow farmers to vote on the future of the Canadian Wheat Board?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am interested in the question posed by the Conservative member. I think the operative words there are "work with".

The difference between the views of the Conservatives and the Liberals on this issue is that the Liberals respect the idea of holding a plebiscite whereas the Conservatives do not.

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If the Conservatives believed that the prairie wheat farmers would support what they are proposing in this bill I suspect they would have held a plebiscite. However, the government knows that the prairie wheat producers do not support what it is doing. That is the reason it will not hold a plebiscite. It realizes it would lose the vote.

Having said that, the evidence is clear that the bill is detrimental and would prove devastating for the prairie farmers as well as for many rural communities.

The following is a quote from *The Economist*:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies. Eventually, this should lead to consolidation and fewer, bigger farms—making Canada a more competitive wheat producer, but devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

I ask the member to provide a comment on that.

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's reference to such an esteemed publication as *The Economist* which clearly states the writing is on the wall, that dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board is not only bad for farmers but it is also bad for rural communities and western Canada. It is a vision based on ideology and corporate interests put forward by the Conservative government that seeks to silence farmers.

We are proposing a vision that would allow farmers to decide their destiny and would allow Canadians to talk about what would benefit our communities and regions, not corporate interests or other countries, and certainly not the friends of the government as we have heard mentioned throughout these last few weeks.

• (1040)

[Translation]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech.

She spoke about structures in place for farmers. In Quebec, there are concerns that the government, which is going after the Canadian Wheat Board today, will go after supply management tomorrow. That would hurt Quebec's economy.

Could the member speak to these concerns?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question, and also for the connection that he and a number of my colleagues from Quebec have made between what is happening with the Wheat Board and the potential threat to the supply management system in Quebec.

How can we believe a government that, just a few months ago, said that it would respect the farmers' vote and democracy and is now changing its mind? The same thing could happen with supply management. What Canadians across this country are seeing with the Wheat Board could happen to them soon enough if we consider this government's agenda and its complete lack of respect for what Canadians want and for the decisions we want to make for our economy and our future.

[English]

Mr. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, during the campaign there was a clear discussion with very clear positions set out on the issue. The

NDP advocated for a single desk. The Conservative Party advocated for freedom of choice for western Canadian farmers.

The result of that is the member is the only rural member of Parliament in western Canada for any of the opposition parties in the Prairies. I ask the hon. member, is that why she chose to have the motion on this very important issue that affects western Canadian farmers seconded by a member of Parliament from Ontario?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, the idea of what was or was not said in the election is quite comical to hear being referenced here today.

In March, at an agricultural forum in Minnedosa in my own province, the Minister of Agriculture, whose agenda is to dismantle the Wheat Board, said that he would "respect the vote of farmers". He said, "Until farmers make that change, I'm not prepared to work arbitrarily. They are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too".

I do not think that the farmers in Minnedosa, the people of Manitoba, or the people of western Canada are simple enough to think that was a reference to May 2. In fact, it was a reference to the Canadian Wheat Board, which is important to every single one of us, not just in western Canada but across Canada.

I would urge the government to be transparent and tell us who it is really working on behalf of. It is working against farmers and for the corporations.

Mr. Rod Bruinooge (Winnipeg South, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am thankful for this opportunity to put a question to my colleague across the way who comes from the same home town as I do. There is the suggestion that the Port of Churchill would be impacted by this change. The member has referenced this often. However, would farmers not continue to ship their grain through Churchill if it was economically viable to do so? Basically, can we find another way to support that line and not make the farmers support it?

Ms. Niki Ashton: Madam Speaker, I would certainly hope that the member across would know quite well, given our common geographic background and he has visited Churchill, the reality is that once the Canadian Wheat Board is gone, 95% of what goes through the Port of Churchill would be gone. These are the facts.

If the government does not want to debate fact, which is clearly the case, then it will keep telling a story that simply is not true. However, if the Wheat Board is gone then a massive base, not just in terms of products but employment and livelihood, would be gone in Churchill. We welcome investment, but to think that anything could substitute the loss of the Wheat Board as we know it is absolutely ludicrous.

We are talking about listening to farmers and the people who want the Wheat Board to exist because it does provide benefit to communities like Churchill, communities like Winnipeg and across western Canada.

• (1045)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to put on the record that this government cannot support this motion. We will not set aside Bill C-18, marketing freedom for grain farmers act, as called for by this motion.

Having said that, I read over the motion and there were two words that jumped out at me, “democracy” and, of course, “supply management”, which the opposition is trying to hook into this argument as well.

In repeated surveys by the Canadian Wheat Board, a majority of farmers have asked for choice and that number keeps going up. As late as last spring, 76% of young and beginning farmers are saying they want a choice, they want an option. That is exactly what this bill would do and the marketing freedom for grain farmers act would deliver that choice. That is democracy at work.

With regard to supply management, that the opposition is trying to hook in here, unlike the members opposite, this government has actually taken concrete action to support supply management. During the last election, we were the only party to state unequivocally our support for supply management directly in our platform. In addition, we reiterated that commitment to supply management in the throne speech in the spring, something I cannot remember, in my 15 years here, happening on the other side at any given time. We have consistently defended our supply management system on the world stage, most recently at the Cairns Group meetings that I hosted in Saskatoon last month.

Please allow me to quote directly from Wally Smith, the newly elected president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, who was with us in Saskatoon. He said:

We welcome [the minister] underscoring that Canada remains steadfast in its support for what works here in Canada, namely our supply management system.

He went on to say:

[The minister] took advantage of the Cairns Group discussions to promote the Government's support for our diverse agricultural sectors by broadening the focus to include other agricultural trade issues such as the role science and innovation can play for farmers, the environment and food security objectives.

I would go on with a whole list of favourable comments from industry on our steadfast support of supply management, but I will do that at another time.

The fact is the opposition is doing contortion acts to make a false connection back to this bill for marketing freedom. The two issues are further apart than apples and oranges. It is actually apples and walnuts. There is no link. Producers in the five supply managed industries, dairy, chicken, turkey, egg and boiler-hatching eggs, worked long and hard to establish these systems 40 years ago next year and we will celebrate that with them. The supply management industry is national in scope and that is one of the major differences between it and the Wheat Board.

There was strong support for the implementation of a supply management system before federal and provincial governments put it in place and it is a joint offering, similar to the Canadian Wheat Board in the Canadian Wheat Board area where four of the provinces

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are involved and three are on-side with us in making these timely and called for changes.

The producers who now participate in the supply managed system are supportive of that system, unlike farmers in the Wheat Board area who want options. Canada's supply management system, unlike the Canadian Wheat Board, does not draw from the public purse to backstop its expenditures where the Canadian Wheat Board, in the last years, has taken \$1.3 billion from the public purse to backstop some mistakes that it made. Supply management is a proven system that enables our farmers to produce top quality poultry and dairy products enjoyed by Canadian farmers and, of course, the genetics from those great industries are world-renowned and in demand around the world.

On the other side of the coin is the Canadian Wheat Board, probably not even on the same coin. The Canadian Wheat Board is a regional monopoly. Supply management is national in scope, as I said. As it stands now, if we grow wheat, durum or barley, in western Canada only, and we want to sell it for export or for food use in Canada, then we have to sell it through the Canadian Wheat Board by law. If we wanted to sell our own wheat when the Liberals were in power, they would put us in shackles and leg irons, and throw us in jail. That was a terrible blight and I know that will be celebrated later today, in the movement forward on this act, by the farmers that were jailed.

Far from being universally supported, as is the case with the supply management system, a growing percentage of producers forced into the Canadian Wheat Board Act are demanding an option and we would deliver that. Our long-standing and continuing support for supply management and our commitment to marketing choice for western grain producers reflect this government's understanding of what Canadian farmers need to run their farm businesses effectively and be economically viable.

Motions like these are desperate scare tactics that the opposition, if it really understood agriculture, should be ashamed of. The opposition's fearmongering will not stop marketing freedom from coming, but it would and could destabilize a multi billion dollar western grain industry. It could undermine the livelihoods of thousands of grain farmers of all sizes.

• (1050)

It would be helpful at this time to cut through the rhetoric and review the basic goals of this dynamic piece of legislation. The main goal behind this change is to provide western Canadian farmers with more ways to achieve economic success.

Farmers who want access to a pooling system will continue to have that option through a new voluntary wheat board, while those who believe they can achieve greater success by dealing directly in the marketplace will also have that opportunity.

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Canadian goods and foodstuffs are in growing demand around the world. Canadian producers in mining, forestry, energy and food are working hard to be the most competitive and successful producers on the globe. Re-organizing the role of a 68-year-old government monopoly with a transition of up to five years is hardly a radical idea.

The opposition loves to use the word “ideologue”, perhaps because it has been a while since its members put forward an idea with any kind of substance. One does not have to be an ideologue to realize the marketing conditions of 2011 are not similar to those of 1943, when the Wheat Board became mandatory. Canada is simply joining the ranks of major advanced industrialized countries that have abandoned these types of marketing systems.

Refusing to adapt and evolve is not a recipe for success but a guarantee of long-term stagnation. This change has been the subject of debate for many years and is now our responsibility to act on the commitment we have made in every election campaign.

Our objective now is to ensure that there is predictability and certainty to allow grain sellers and buyers to plan effectively for the coming season. This legislation has garnered overwhelming support from farmers, farm groups and industry as a whole.

The government has heard from a great number of entrepreneurial farmers who believe that their own operations will be more successful if they have the marketing choices this bill would provide.

A broadly based working group concluded in a report just last month that this would be the case. The fact is, today's entrepreneurial farmers are proving over and over that they can and will help drive our economy if they have control over their farm businesses and ultimately over their own bottom line.

For the grain industry this means a choice in how they market their grain, a choice in when they sell their crop, a choice in who they sell their crop to, a choice in what price they sell their own commodity for, and ultimately a choice in whether they sell their crop to a new voluntary wheat board or on the open market.

Our comprehensive plan brings certainty and clarity to farmers, industry and the market overall. The government has always maintained that farmers must have a choice in how they market their grain, whether that is individually or in an open market through a voluntary Canadian wheat board.

The act enables the government to provide the Canadian Wheat Board with the initial support required to operate as a voluntary marketing organization, allowing it time to transition to full private ownership. We will work with the board to ensure this transition happens, as soon and as smoothly as possible.

Once passed, the act will also allow farmers and grain companies to immediately enter into forward contracts with the purchase or sale of wheat, barley and durum for execution after the beginning of the crop year, August 1, 2012. This will allow farmers and the entire value chain to plan accordingly and transition in an orderly fashion.

This new freedom also has many economic benefits for communities across the Prairies. There has been a lot of doom and gloom speculated on here, but processors will now be able to open

their doors for business, unfettered by the current requirement to buy wheat and barley only from the Canadian Wheat Board.

Canada's grain industry is a powerhouse that brings \$16 billion to the farm gate and makes up almost half of our agricultural exports, but what once was Canada's signature crop is lagging behind. Wheat and barley innovation have become stagnant. Competition for acres has weakened, and new crops, such as canola, have surpassed wheat in value on the Prairies.

A C.D. Howe report released this spring confirmed that Canada's share of annual worldwide wheat production has fallen by 50%. Equally, Canadian market share of world barley exports has declined by 40%. With that reduced market share, the Canadian Wheat Board has far less influence on the world stage, and as a result, has become a price taker.

We have seen tremendous growth in value-added opportunities across the Prairies over the last 20 years for crops that do not have a monopoly market, including oats, pulses and canola. We will see these same opportunities open up for wheat and barley as we implement this marketing freedom act.

We will work with farmers and industry to attract investment, encourage innovation, create value-added jobs and build a stronger economy. We know that the potential for wheat durum and barley is high, but the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board as it is, is standing in the way.

Look what happened to oats when it came out from under the monopoly. In Manitoba alone the acreage of oats has increased by 175,000 acres since its removal from the Wheat Board's control in 1989. Within weeks of that decision, two new processing plants were announced. Several more plants have been built in the late eighties and early nineties, significantly changing the oat market. This includes Can-Oat in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, which today employs 125 people. Manitoba now processes a half a million tonnes of oats annually.

• (1055)

Just over the border in North Dakota, there are many new pasta plants that have sprung up creating jobs that could have been created in Manitoba, Saskatchewan or Alberta for that matter.

We can expect more processors to start up new businesses in Canada. Private marketers of wheat and barley will expand their work forces. Milling firms will be able to purchase directly from the farmer of their choice at a price and time they negotiate. Entrepreneurs will have the option of starting up their own small specialty flour mills and malting and pasta plants.

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In fact, just lately we had the honour of turning the sod on a new pasta plant in Regina, Saskatchewan. The company does manufacture pasta worldwide now but has stayed out of Canada because of the monopoly and all the red tape involved in dealing directly with durum producers. The new plant slated to open next year will create 60 permanent jobs and up to 150 temporary jobs. The stage is set. Market forces can come to bear.

Forward-thinking processors like Alliance Grain Traders will be able to deal directly with farmers for the quality and consistency of supply that has gone missing in the ridiculous buy-back program that the Wheat Board has implemented. The business model in Regina is based on more than just that, but at the end of the day, certainly this makes it easier to move forward.

Murad Al-Katib, a young, dynamic businessman from Davidson, Saskatchewan, was unequivocal in stating the removal of the single desk makes this new pasta plant in Regina all that much more possible.

Alliance Grain Traders has built a world-class pulse handling system for lentils, peas and so forth, doing it right here where they are grown not at point of sale, as the Wheat Board claims must be done. It sees that same opportunity for durum pasta and I look forward to celebrating its future successes, successes that would not be possible without this government's important legislation.

As one Saskatchewan farmer told *The Globe and Mail* recently, "I'm looking forward to selling to them" and I am sure he speaks for other durum growers in his province as well.

All this is great news for Saskatchewan and I know there is more to come. It is simple logic, but it seems to be lost on a lot of the naysayers. More buyers mean more competition and a better price for a farmer's grain. We are already seeing two commodity exchanges on both sides of the border start to compete for farmers' wheat.

For the first time ever, the Minneapolis Grain Exchange will be accepting futures of Canadian grain. For the first time ever, the Minneapolis Grain Exchange will be allowing Canadian grain to be used to settle futures contracts.

The Intercontinental Exchange Futures Canada in Winnipeg has announced that its own spring wheat futures contract based in western Canada will be ready for trading as soon as the bill receives royal assent. This is tremendous news, which means that farmers will have an important risk management tool for the day when they begin to market their grain themselves.

We are hearing a lot of fearmongering about big corporations, but the fact is that there are strong Canadian companies in the business who are eager to make marketing freedom work, of course, including a number of farmer-owned terminals across western Canada now who also own their own port terminal in Vancouver.

Mayo Schmidt, the president and CEO of Viterra, again a top-quality Canadian company headquartered in Regina, was quoted this past Friday saying he is eager to work with the voluntary board to move the industry forward. He will handle their grain. This is his quote:

If the Wheat Board chooses to engage with industry to frame out a relationship and access to the (grain-handling) system, which will be provided, I think their prospects will be greater if they do it sooner than if they do it later.

Let us stop holding them up and let the market work. He also said: "The opportunity is now to take advantage of the openness and willingness of all players to welcome them as a participant". He added that competition for farmers' grain will be fierce, adding that it is bound to increase dramatically as it has since the end of the Australian Wheat Board's grain monopoly three years ago.

As we all know, nothing good ever comes easily. As is evident by our comprehensive plan, our government is working diligently with industry to make the road to an open market as smooth as possible. We are taking every precaution to ensure that the transition period is as smooth as possible for farmers and industry overall.

Canada's farmers grow world-class food in a global marketplace that is ripe with opportunity. We are seeking to put wheat and barley farmers back in the driver's seat so they can seize these opportunities. Our government will free our farmers so they can continue to drive the economy and feed Canada and the world.

The motion from the member for Churchill is counterproductive and will only hurt the overall grain industry in western Canada. It is not surprising the opposition seems out of touch with western farmers, as it has no rural seats in the Wheat Board affected area. What is surprising is that opposition members continue to put their own self-interests ahead of ensuring stability and marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers.

I urge all members of the House to work for farmers, not against them. Let us show western Canadian grain farmers that their voices have been heard, that marketing freedom is a right they deserve, and vote against this reckless motion.

•(1100)

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, first, I would like to challenge the statement that none of us is elected from a Wheat Board affected area. In representing Churchill, I cannot think of a community that stands to be, along with so many others, as affected by the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board.

I heard the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food talk a lot about the well-being of farmers. Obviously in line with what we are debating here today, my question for the minister is: What is wrong with allowing farmers to vote on the future of the Wheat Board? If we are talking about the potential benefit for farmers, why are he and his government not allowing farmers to vote when it comes to deciding their own future? What is he afraid of? What is his government afraid of? Is it because the plebiscite showed that a majority of farmers support the single desk?

My question is: If we are talking about their benefit, why do we not let farmers decide?

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Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, in that vein, I am hopeful that the member who represents Churchill will actually let Churchill help her decide that this is a good piece of work.

The incentive we put forward for Churchill maintains the incentive, the dollar incentive. It would provide \$5 million a year for five years, to ensure farmers are incented to bring product through Churchill.

We have gone one step further than just Board grains. We have allowed that incentive to now cover non-Board grains, canolas, pulses. There were a couple of ships of pulses shipped through Churchill last year. This is a great incentive to ensure they can diversify and continue to move forward.

There is also a \$4 million investment from Transport Canada to upgrade some of the docking facilities to make sure that, when those ships come in, they do it safely and efficiently.

Also, some money that was allocated from western diversification a few years ago will be extended so they have time to actually make use of that money.

Of course, that all builds on the \$30-some million that was put into Churchill in budget 2008, I think, which of course she voted against.

So, I am hoping that she stands on behalf of Churchill and votes with them. She should call the mayor, call Mike, and find out from him that this is a great initiative. He wants it. She should support it.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have said in this House many times before, through you, that while we may not live in the prairie provinces, we do know where our food comes from and we know it does not come from the grocery stores. We know it comes from the hard work of western Canadian farmers.

That being said, the minister speaks of the choice of farmers. In Minnedosa, he did say to them that he would not act arbitrarily. He did say to them that he would conduct a vote.

I would ask the minister, through you, Madam Speaker, what exactly he meant when he said to those farmers in Minnedosa, "You will be allowed a vote. I will not act arbitrarily". What exactly did he mean?

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, words that were said in Minnedosa are taken out of context on this point. We were discussing the election of the directors at that time. I said, "I'm not going to speak out against what farmers have elected".

We were also talking about a barley plebiscite that we did in 2008 that the Wheat Board overruled through court action. That was against what farmers wished for at that time.

Having said that, I do agree with the member opposite that farmers in Canada do produce top-quality foodstuffs. However, they do need a direction to move forward.

I am not moving arbitrarily. This government is not moving arbitrarily. We now have, and have always had, the support of three of the provinces involved in this Canadian Wheat Board area. They are on our side moving forward. British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan, which produce 85% to 90% of the Wheat Board commodities, are on side with us. The major farm groups, the Grain

Growers of Canada, western wheat growers and western barley growers, are on side. Farmers who have their boots on the ground in western Canada want this to happen and need this to happen. So there are no arbitrary moves here. The member for Guelph should actually talk to the farmers who want this to happen.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I find this debate somewhat interesting. It might be confusing for Canadians watching the debate. We have this motion put forward by the NDP. It is seconded by the member for Welland. And the most prominent spokesperson in the Liberal Party is my good friend from Guelph.

I would like the minister to clarify. What impact does the Canadian Wheat Board have on farmers from Welland or the Guelph area?

• (1105)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, actually, the farmers of Ontario are privileged to have an optional Ontario wheat board, run by Barry Senft. It is doing an excellent job. I was reminded by the chair of the Grain Farmers of Ontario, Don Kenny, of the change that was made in 2003. We used his farm as a backdrop to make this announcement the other day. And of course, Barry Senft was there as well. They talked about the changes made in 2003, how farmers in Ontario have embraced that. They are now growing 50% more coarse grains; whereas, as I outlined, in western Canada we have lost 50% of our wheat production and 40% of our barley production. So Ontario at this point is literally eating our lunch. That is not a bad thing because it drives processing here in Ontario. The member for Welland and the member for Guelph will tell us that there is a tremendous amount of processing going on here at point of production.

We want to see that happen in western Canada. It is not allowed under the Wheat Board Act. We are going to change that.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry for mentioning Welland on more than one occasion in the House. It is always a great joy when other members recognize my riding without my having to do it myself.

Let me be clear about why I would second it or not and why folks in Ontario are or are not in support of the Wheat Board. What I said in the House yesterday and what I am saying today is that in Ontario, as the minister has pointed out, there was a difference in 2003 because farmers chose that. It was not an act of government; the farmers chose it in Ontario. All we in the NDP are asking for is that western farmers make the choice.

I absolutely agree that there is a divergent viewpoint among farmers themselves, not just among members in the House. Certain prairie farmers want to do it one way, and other farmers want to continue the single desk. The simple question to the minister is: Why not allow them to have a choice? Why do we not debate the question we should ask and make it a fair question? I understand it may not be this or that; there may be another option. We should make it a fair question and let the farmers decide.

Business of Supply

Ultimately, an election is not necessarily about farmers deciding, especially, as was pointed out by some members, if they live in downtown Toronto. Do people who live in downtown Edmonton really know about prairie farmers any more than downtown Torontonians do? It begs the question on that.

I would ask the minister to respond as to why we do not give farmers the choice to decide for themselves.

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, the main difference about the Ontario wheat board prior to 2003 is that there was not a federally legislated law that said farmers had to sell to it. It was not mandated by federal legislation. That is the situation we face in western Canada.

I am more than happy to allow farmers the freedom. Right now they are voting with their air seeders and their trucks. As I said, they have grown other crops. It has given rise to a dramatic special crops industry led by pulses; it has given rise to a world-class canola industry, and that is what has happened. Farmers have voted with their air seeders and their trucks. They are not taking out permit books; they are not growing rotational crops like wheat, durum and barley, and that is unfortunate because now we are running into some disease problems in canola. Barley is needed in that rotation in order to clean the clubroot out of the soil.

We are going to get back to that by giving farmers the opportunity to vote with their air seeders; continue to vote on their own and do what is in the best interests of their own farm enterprises.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to make a comment about the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food's statement that he supports supply management in other parts of the country.

I was looking at the video on the website of the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands, the talking Eskimo video, and in it there is a young farmer who is making the argument that he wants to be able to sell his wheat to his brother to make bread. I am wondering about farmers in my own riding who might consider selling raw milk to a cheese maker down the road without having to get a quota.

I am wondering if the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food is prepared to take the time to explain to farmers that, no, it is in their best interests to have quotas and supply management for milk, and if he would be willing to defend that in negotiations with other countries.

• (1110)

Hon. Gerry Ritz: Madam Speaker, I am a little concerned with the direction in which the member for Kingston and the Islands is going. He is actually saying he does not support supply management. That is unfortunate.

This government has never been shy. As I said, there are quotes from Wally Smith, the new president of the Dairy Farmers of Canada, at the Cairns Group, which includes Australia and New Zealand who have been most vociferous against our supply-managed sector. We go right after them. We are not shy about saying the quality, consistency and high calibre that our supply-managed sector delivers in Canada is second to none. There have been no government bailouts, as we have seen in the U.S. and the European

Union, for dairy farmers in Canada. They draw their money from the marketplace by delivering a top-quality, consistent supply.

International processors, such as Danone, the latest one in Quebec, are moving in to make use of our yoghurt. There is another one coming into Ontario very soon. They are world class and deserve our support. They deserve his.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am certainly grateful for another opportunity to rise and speak to the wrong-headed, ideological attack the Conservative government has perpetrated on western grain farmers and the family farm across Canada.

I am grateful for this opportunity because, sadly, it was not one the government was willing to afford the producers most meaningfully impacted by its reckless decision to kill the single desk marketing and sales arm of the Canadian Wheat Board.

More than the disenfranchisement of western wheat and barley growers, this is about the disenfranchisement of Canadians. The government demonstrated in the last Parliament that it was not about to listen to any voice that opposed its singular branded message. It fired Paul Kennedy, head of the Commission for Public Complaints Against the RCMP. It fired Linda Keen, chair of the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission.

Now every time a Conservative MP talks about his or her mandate, the subtext is subtly “resistance is futile”. Western Canadian grain growers will not be silenced. Neither will we on this side of the House.

Predictably, as it has done with the bill meant to address human smuggling, its omnibus crime bill and its budget bill, the Conservative government gave notice of motion for time allocation after only an hour and a half of debate.

While I understand that listening to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food can be tiring even for a Conservative partisan, standing up for western farmers who may disagree with the minister—even Conservative farmers whom the government refuses to listen to—is no reason to cut off debate.

Clearly the Conservative government acknowledged my assertion that we should not be having this debate, since the bill is very obviously in contravention of section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act. Its response, however, instead of holding a plebiscite, was to bury its head in the sand to a wave of criticism levelled at its illegal actions.

I will remind hon. members that section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act states:

The minister shall not cause to be introduced in Parliament a bill that would exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley, or wheat or barley produced in any area in Canada...unless (a) the Minister has consulted with the board about the exclusion or extension; and (b) the producers of the grain have voted in favour of the exclusion or extension, the voting process having been determined by the Minister.

Business of Supply

The government is missing a key element in its ideological pursuit of the death of the single desk sales and marketing system: the will of the majority of western Canadian grain farmers. Consequently, the legislation before us over the past week exceeds the authority of the government, based on its neglect in fulfilling all of its obligations.

The institution of the Canadian Wheat Board is considered so sacrosanct that codified in the statute is a mechanism designed to protect farmers from a government arbitrarily removing the strength and clout of an agency that sells wheat and barley at the best possible prices on behalf of all western Canadian grain farmers. Section 47.1 was enshrined in the Canadian Wheat Board Act to prevent the very abuse that is being perpetrated by the minister and the government.

Repeatedly throughout the past few days of debate, Conservative members have lamented the plebiscite and argued its imperfections. On this side, we have never insisted that the government take the word of 62% of wheat farmers and 51% of barley farmers for granted. Instead, like true democrats we have argued that the government, if not satisfied with the plebiscite held by farmers themselves, should hold its own plebiscite, as mandated by the act, and determine the will of farmers.

The Liberal Party is not one to stand in the way should a majority of farmers in the Prairies decide to cut out their marketing and sales arm. They know best. They must decide for themselves, as they have a right to decide for themselves.

We have been clear from the start: let farmers decide. The government will not even allow that to happen. Despite its lamentations on Ontario's ability to market its own grain, the government conveniently forgets that Ontario wheat farmers made their own decision to stop marketing grain through a single desk.

Canadians must know that the marketing of wheat in Ontario and the marketing of wheat in the Prairies are two very different situations. Ontario produces soft wheat used for pastry, cookies and doughnuts, while the red spring wheat from the west goes to making durum and pasta. Ontario flour mills rely on prairie wheat for bread flour.

• (1115)

Moreover, the Prairies produce 80% of Canada's wheat, ten times more wheat than eastern Canada. Ninety percent of Ontario wheat is consumed in Ontario or the northeast United States; meanwhile, 68% of Prairie wheat is exported. It is destined to other countries at greater transportation costs, costs that are kept low by the clout of the Wheat Board. Transportation is certainly less a factor in Ontario, given its close location to its markets.

Why is it, then, that Conservative MPs from the Prairies trust western grain farmers when relying on their votes, but less so to make their own decisions on marketing and selling their grain? Despite their Reform Party ideology, this Conservative Party seems to have forgotten, once having come to power, that western Canadian grain producers deserve the same right to self-determination as that exercised by Ontario farmers decades ago.

Neither the Prime Minister nor the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food has ever made much of a secret of their single-minded desire for the death of the single desk system, but their reluctance to hear from the Canadian public on the issue is disturbing. Indeed, I

have received messages from western producers that their own Conservative MPs are refusing to take their calls or answer their emails in their plight to be heard. So blinded are these western Conservative MPs, so zealous are they in their pursuit, that they have abandoned their responsibilities to their constituents.

Interestingly, heading into an election, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was more than willing to listen to farmers. He assured western Canadian grain producers in Minnedosa, as recited in the *Manitoba Co-operator* in March, that farmers would have their say on the fate of the single desk system, that he would not act arbitrarily and that a Conservative government would not undertake any action without hearing first from farmers, yet once elected, neither the minister nor the Prime Minister was willing to hear the voice of the majority of farmers.

I hearken to a comment made many years ago by the Prime Minister that he would change the face of Canadian politics. He has done more than change the face: he has disfigured it. Instead, the minister, the Prime Minister and other members of the Conservatives' string puppet orchestra harp on about a mandate.

In August 68,000 ballots were mailed out to farmers. Over the course of that month, meetings were held across the Prairies. Hundreds of farmers came in off the fields for meetings as harvest began, simply to ensure their voices were heard. I and other members of my party were there. We saw the many hundreds for ourselves and we heard their voices, their dismay and anger at the government. Farmers from both sides attended these meetings, listened respectfully and made their points as to why they believed the single desk should go or stay.

There is no mandate to proceed illegally with a bill to jeopardize the livelihood of western Canadian grain farmers. Not even receiving 24% support from eligible voters would give a mandate to tear the marketing sales arm away from Canadian farmers.

In Colonsay, Saskatchewan, in the riding of the minister of western economic diversification, farmers do not believe there is a mandate to kill the single desk system. They gathered there together on Friday in protest and said so. Nor do they believe that in Brandon-Souris, where again farmers gathered to say so, yet apparently their members of Parliament are deaf to the voices of their constituents. Even after three days of debate, not one single Conservative prairie MP has had the courage to stand up and defend the rights of their constituents to hold a government-conducted plebiscite as mandated by section 47.1 of the act.

Business of Supply

Later this week, farmers will gather in Winnipeg. While we can only hope that the government will take the time to take notice, we should not hold our breath, because the government does not notice anything or anyone who is not in total agreement with it.

The results of the plebiscite were unambiguous. There was a 56% response rate, a number similar to the turnout in many recent general elections and by-elections, including in the minister's own riding. Sixty-two per cent of wheat producers and 51% of barley producers voted to retain their single desk marketing and sales arm under the Canadian Wheat Board. Regrettably, the minister dismissed the results as an expensive survey.

Unfortunately, Canadians do not have the same opportunity to dismiss their muzzled Prairie MPs' own election results similarly.

● (1120)

Strangely, just yesterday Conservative MPs were willing to cite other Canadian Wheat Board surveys only so long as they were in compliance with their own viewpoints. Again I ask the members opposite to remember where they hid their courage before walking into this chamber, and if they are so confident in the will of western Canadian grain farmers, to hold a plebiscite.

Instead the government, through its misguided legislation, has sought to silence farmers in every way possible. Not only does it blatantly ignore the right of western Canadian grain farmers to self-determination through a plebiscite, but it is eliminating the democratic will of farmers through their elected farm directors. Clause 12 of Bill C-18 states that:

Every person holding office as an elected director of the Canadian Wheat Board immediately before the day on which this Part comes into force ceases to hold office on that day.

These are farmers chosen by farmers to be on the board and represent their interests, and now there shall be none. Instead of 10 elected directors, the Canadian Wheat Board will consist of five Conservative-appointed directors.

Consistently, eight of the 10 elected directors have consistently supported the single desk system. By reducing the number of directors from 10 elected and five appointed to simply five government-appointed directors on the five-year interim voluntary wheat board, the Conservative government would have it that only its own people, dictated to from the Prime Minister's Office, would speak for the multitude of farmers, thus suppressing any sort of democratic expression. The government places a higher value on ideology than on the experience of farmers.

Many, including the otherwise conservative magazine *The Economist*, argue that in the fragile state of the world economy, dismantling this single desk system will mean that:

Smaller producers, faced with mounting marketing costs, will inevitably have to sell their farms to bigger rivals or agribusiness companies...devastating small prairie towns, whose economies depend on individual farmers with disposable income.

What is to stop the market freedom government from going further? Janis Joplin once sang that "freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose". There is more to lose. Once the government dismantles the single desk for Canadian wheat, the only thing left to lose will be the supply management system for poultry, dairy and

eggs. I suppose that farmers at that point will not be "nothin' if they ain't free".

The United States has unilaterally thickened the border in an effort to "stimulate their economy". The number one trade asked by Americans has always been to get rid of the Wheat Board. Why? It is because it gives our farmers a competitive advantage. Now the Conservative government is kowtowing to our neighbours to the south by not only rolling over on protectionism but also offering up our competitive advantage as an appetizer. This comes from a Prime Minister who criticized our former Liberal government for not deregulating our banking system as the Americans had, and as they wished, wishing instead to walk in lockstep with our neighbours on every issue and getting nothing in return.

There have been 14 challenges to the World Trade Organization from the United States demanding we get rid of the Canadian Wheat Board. In every instance, the WTO has ruled in our favour and allowed western grain producers to maintain their valuable resource. Let us make no mistake: once it is gone, the provisions of our trade agreement say that it can never be brought back.

Just yesterday, the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food was caught unable to answer why the government feels our future key grain decisions are just as well made in Minneapolis, Chicago or Kansas City, where they will be. There have been no assurances made by the government regarding Canadian food sovereignty. It is one thing that these small family farms will be bought up by massive agribusinesses; it is entirely another to see Canadian farms expropriated by foreign interests, not unlike the purchasing of our mineral-rich lands out west. These interests are concerned with their own national food security and not at all with Canadian food sovereignty.

Last week I asserted that the Prime Minister has become the head chef and bottle-washer to the U.S. trade administration, but I was wrong: to be the head chef, the U.S. would have to come to us. Instead, we will shortly become the all-too-willing caterer to the perpetual buffet of trade concessions.

● (1125)

Regardless of the assertions of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture made yesterday respecting supply management, the government could not even make good on its promise to western Canadian grain producers to listen to their voice. What assurances can the remaining five supply managed industries glean? We would be foolish and naive to think that our supply managed industries, poultry, dairy and eggs, are not already now being lined up in the sights of the government for their demise.

Business of Supply

Farmers' will also be free to be railroaded by CN and CP Rail. Representatives of other agricultural industries have approached me concerned that Canada is regarded as an unreliable supplier of agricultural commodities by virtue of the fact that it cannot get its supplies to port along the railway. In large part, this is a direct result of the ongoing disputes between suppliers and CN-CP Rail.

The agricultural industries anticipated that these concerns would be addressed in the rail service review tabled in March. Meanwhile, seven months later, we are talking about stripping prairie farmers of transportation infrastructure while the government shelves yet another report.

Where is the facilitator for the rail industry? I have spoken to pulse producers and they have asked where the rail service level agreements are for them and other producers across the agricultural industry. Where are the mechanisms to protect farmers and prevent abuse by unresponsive rail companies?

The Minister of State for Transport has been remarkably silent on this issue. Shortline Railway owners are rightfully worried that they will no longer be able to maintain their railways without the support of the Canadian Wheat Board once it has gone. Western grain farmers have turned to the shortlines in response to the closing of sidings and unresponsive railway companies.

Farmers understand the virtue of saving \$1,400 per producer car on transportation costs through the CWB's unique bargaining position, a savings that will be lost almost immediately. Presently, it is in a position to negotiate with CN and CP Rail to ensure the adequate supply of producer cars. With the loss of the clout of the Canada Wheat Board, this, too, will be lost.

In my conversations with western Canadian grain farmers, all too often I have heard tragic stories about the treatment of producers at the hands of the railways. The railway companies have such disregard for wheat farmers that often they will send railway cars with holes in them, without any consideration for what grain will be lost along the way. Farmers individually are up against the behemoth where once their collective clout enabled them recourse in the face of such poor treatment.

The government seems intent on spending a conservatively estimated \$500 million, in a time when it claims that we are still in a fragile economic state, to demobilize an organization that has yet to require any federal funding. It has been farmer funded for farmer profits and yet the so-called Conservatives are ready to forsake billions of dollars in revenue for farmers while spending hundreds of millions to dismantle it.

Clearly, the protection of the family farm in the prairie provinces is not a priority under a Conservative government. The Conservatives might have done anything else to accommodate the popular will of a majority of wheat and barley farmers and yet decided against it for their own ideological needs.

The legislation is endemic of the government's mean-spiritedness. It is ill-conceived. Just yesterday, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board was forced to take down a video on his website that was not only blatantly inaccurate, but contained repeated bigoted racist slurs.

Such is the arrogance of the government that it feels it is no longer responsible to ordinary Canadians for its actions. The legislation made it clear and the will of western Canadian farmers confirmed that the Canadian Wheat Board is an essential institution on the prairies.

Having only passed second reading, the government still has the opportunity to withdraw its legislation and hold a plebiscite to finally determine the will of Canadian farmers. I implore the government to conduct such a plebiscite in the interests of our farmers and in the interests of democracy.

• (1130)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing—NDP): Madam Speaker, for my constituents, this is more about food security than it is about marketing or competition.

Increasingly, we are tied to a system of food production and distribution that leaves us vulnerable to other countries when we produce less of what we need ourselves. Our farmlands near cities have turned into suburban housing and our food travels farther and farther in the name of maximizing profit. Most cities do not even have a few weeks worth of food in them and our vulnerability gets worse in the winter months. We are at the mercy of climate change and rising energy prices, which also create big challenges for the global food market.

This is the time when we should be developing plans to reduce our reliance on an overly complex food distribution system and using our energy to create better local networks to feed ourselves. It is not a time for the government to let the whims of international markets leave us further exposed, which is what this bill would do. I wonder if the member would like to elaborate on that.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, *The Economist*, to which I referred in my remarks, addresses that very issue. Small farms out west will cease to exist. This was confirmed by conversations I have had with farmers who are in favour of scrapping the Wheat Board. The average age of farmers is 58 years old. Many farmers out west exceed that age and will be unable to make the transition. When their farms close, they will be sold, and not just to large agri-business. They will be sold to international corporations, perhaps even other countries, which I have said, have interests of their own, and their interests are not consistent with Canada's need for food security and food sovereignty.

The member's question was very insightful. This is a concern that farmers have out west and that consumers and Canadians have right across the country.

Business of Supply

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I say that we should let the people decide. We should have a plebiscite. Many of my neighbours have told me that they think the Conservative Party should be the only political party in the country and that the Conservative Party should hold a monopoly on politics in the country. We should have a plebiscite on whether the Conservative Party should form a monopoly in the country.

Do the members opposite honestly believe that it would be proper to have a vote on something like that? The Wheat Board issue is a rights issue as well. Farmers produce their grain. They put all the money and effort into it. It is their property and no one has the right to limit the way they market their commodity.

However, that is what the opposition is trying to do. It is suggesting that should continue. The Wheat Board started as a voluntary group, with voluntary participation. The monopoly was only put in place during the war effort and should have been removed right after the war but it was not. I do not know why but we are doing the job now.

Do the members opposite and that member honestly believe that it is okay to have a vote on removing people's rights?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his comments that we should have a plebiscite.

The difference is that there is no legislation surrounding the election of the Conservatives throughout Canada as he suggests. There is legislation. Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act does require a plebiscite. Section 47.1 says that before the government can act and change the terms and conditions of the Canadian Wheat Board and its very existence, it must ask the farmers. So sacrosanct is this institution and so helpful to the western Canadian farmers that its very existence is ensconced in legislation. To remove its existence requires their vote. It is called self-determination. That is what I would direct my friend to, section 47.1.

This is an organization that sells to a hundred different—

•(1135)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. There were many people rising for questions, so I would like to give members the opportunity to ask further questions.

The hon. member for Sydney-Victoria.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for all the hard work he has been doing on the agriculture file, going across the country, working on committee and fighting for farmers and for reliable food production.

It is very clear what the Conservatives are doing by dismantling the Wheat Board. However, what is also being exposed here is what they are planning on doing with the other marketing boards across the country, with the SM5. I think it will be blatantly clear what the United States, with its subsidized grains, will be doing with those SM5 marketing boards.

My hon. colleague lives in Guelph, which is the centre of a very large agriculture area. What will happen when the government dismantles the other marketing boards? What will happen in southern Ontario when the flood of eggs, milk and chicken start coming across the border when the marketing board is dismantled?

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, our deepest concern is that at every trade negotiation the government will be asked to compromise and sacrifice the sanctity of supply management for the same reasons that it has been asked to dismantle the Wheat Board. It is only a matter of time before the supply managed poultry, eggs and dairy will be under the scalpel. There is no question of that.

It is no surprise that there are so many agricultural publications out there now. I have seen them and I am sure members must have seen them in western newspapers and other publications talking about the threat that supply management poses to Canadian consumers. This is just the beginning of the chat so that the government can set up its next target.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was shocked as I sat here listening to the member for Vegreville—Wainwright calling for a plebiscite. I was absolutely enthused to hear that maybe he is actually echoing the people who voted for him to be here, people from Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Alberta who want to be heard and who want a plebiscite.

If we have members of the governing side actually calling for this, it is a game changer. Why do the Conservatives not actually listen to the people who voted for them to be here?

I would like to ask my hon. colleague for his thoughts on letting the people who voted for him speak in this House?

Mr. Leon Benoit: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The member knows full well that I was calling for a plebiscite, tongue in cheek, on whether the Conservative Party should be the only party allowed in Canada. I did—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. That is a matter of debate and not a point of order.

The hon. member for Guelph.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, I, too, am pleased that the member for Vegreville—Wainwright has now conceded that a plebiscite is necessary. I have already explained that the plebiscite that we are talking about is enshrined in legislation, whereas a plebiscite to make the Conservative Party of Canada the only party in Canada is not enshrined in legislation, although I am certain the member would like it to be. There is no question of that.

However, what is important is that the conduct of the government is disenfranchising 70,000 farmers in western Canada. It is ignoring their rights of self-determination, and I cannot stress that point enough.

•(1140)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was able to contrast positions earlier between the NDP and the Conservatives. I could not do that with the Liberals because I searched the word "wheat" in their 2011 platform and it was not there. However, I did articulate the Conservative position. The member referenced two ridings, Blackstrap and Brandon—Souris. I would just point out for the member that, after the clear question during the election campaign, in Blackstrap 54% voted Conservative, almost 70% in the rural area, and—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I must give the hon. member for Guelph 30 seconds to respond.

Business of Supply

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Madam Speaker, interestingly, the Conservatives only received 24% of all eligible voters support in the last election. I can tell my friend from Edmonton, having been out west four times now this year talking about this issue, that a lot of Conservative farmers approached me and said that they may have voted Conservative but that they did not vote Conservative for the purpose of dismantling the Wheat Board.

I would remind the member that the word “wheat” did not show up in the Conservatives’ platform during the election either.

Mr. Mike Lake: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would just point out that on page 59 of the Conservative platform we reference the Canadian Wheat Board.

The Deputy Speaker: Those are questions of debate. I think the hon. members realize that these are not points of order.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of our party’s opposition motion on the Canadian Wheat Board. I am pleased to split my time with my colleague, the member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine.

I am very happy to hear there may be some movement on the other side in that members are asking for a plebiscite, which is at the heart of the opposition day motion.

Our motion, as so eloquently introduced by the member for Churchill, calls on the government to set aside its legislation abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board and to conduct a full and free vote by all current members of the Canadian Wheat Board to determine their wishes. My speech today will speak directly to this motion, which is a direct reaction to Bill C-18, An Act to reorganize the Canadian Wheat Board and to make consequential and related amendments to certain Acts. I support our motion not only because I believe that maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board is important for Canadians, but I also feel Bill C-18 undermines Canadian democracy and is another example of how the Conservatives are using their majority power in an irresponsible manner.

There are two critical aspects of Canadian democracy. One of them is with regard to outcomes and the other is with regard to process. With respect to outcomes, those who often judge the health of a democracy examine the extent to which the preferences of minority groups are respected when elected governments make decisions. In terms of process, the extent to which a democracy can be considered healthy rests on the extent to which governments include citizens in both electoral and non-electoral decision making. Our motion speaks to how Bill C-18 undermines Canadian democracy with regard to both outcomes and process, and I hope all members of the House will support it.

Before discussing how Bill C-18 undermines both the outcome and process of democracy, it is worth stepping back to look at the institution which we support with our motion.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the prairie farmers’ marketing organization for wheat, durum and barley. It is the largest and most successful grain marketing company in the world. It is a very impressive institution, proud to be called Canadian and recognized around the world.

The Canadian Wheat Board’s roots date back to the 1920s when western farmers began pooling their grain in order to obtain better prices. It was a collective effort supported right across the country. In 1943 the single desk was created, mandating all prairie farmers to market their wheat through the Canadian Wheat Board. The single desk structure provided financial stability, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply, all important during the war years but also after the war ended.

The Canadian Wheat Board is controlled, directed and funded by farmers. It is not a government organization; it is a farmers organization. The Canadian Wheat Board sells all around the world and arranges for transportation from thousands of farms to customers in 70 countries. About 21 million tonnes of wheat and barley are marketed by the Canadian Wheat Board every year.

Eighty per cent of the wheat grown in western Canada each year is exported overseas. It is not only an important Canadian institution but it is an important organization worldwide. Overseas exports are the Canadian Wheat Board’s core business, but it also supplies Canadian millers and maltsters. The Canadian Wheat Board does not set grain prices, which again is an important component of the Canadian Wheat Board, but prices are established by global supply and demand factors. However, its size and market power are used to help maximize grain prices.

The benefit to farmers is clear in the mandate of the Canadian Wheat Board and its practice. It helps farmers worldwide. It helps Canadian farmers, but it still operates within the confines of the market. The prices are established by global supply and demand. However, it provides farmers certainty.

The Canadian Wheat Board does not buy wheat and barley from farmers. Instead, it acts as their marketing agent. There is such a big fuss for an institution that is really a marketing agent. We hear the other side talk about monopolies and trampling on minority rights. It is a marketing board that is doing good work for farmers and, in fact, allowing them to survive.

The Canadian Wheat Board negotiates international sales and passes the return back to farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board retains no earnings aside from what is needed to cover the costs and financial risk management.

• (1145)

The Canadian Wheat Board supports its marketing program through a variety of other activities, including market development, strategy, research and analysis, and policy advocacy. Again, this is an organization that is built by farmers, helping farmers to get the best prices possible but still operating within the market. There is nothing insidious here. It only helps. In fact, it is the only way in which a number of small farms survive.

The Canadian Wheat Board also administers assistance for grain delivery and farmer payments, including innovative pricing programs that help producers manage cash flow and risk.

I did not grow up on the Prairies; I grew up in rural Nova Scotia where I was surrounded by farms. Lots of farms cannot make it, especially small farms. They collapse because the risk is so great. The Canadian Wheat Board helps these small farms survive. If we abolish it, these small farms will undoubtedly collapse.

The Canadian Wheat Board mitigates risk for farmers, including when and if they will get paid on time, whether they are willing to sell their grain to the right buyer on the right day and how to get the grain to the buyer.

It is not a government agency or crown corporation. It is not funded by taxpayers. Farmers pay for its operation from their grain revenue. Again, it is not a government agency nor a crown corporation. Here again is an example of an arrogant majority government interfering in an organization that is operated outside the confines of government.

I will return to my two main points about outcomes and process being ways that we can evaluate the health of our Canadian democracy.

In terms of outcomes, Bill C-18 proposes to dismantle the farmer-controlled and funded Canadian Wheat Board by eliminating the single desk marketing of wheat and barley.

It establishes a voluntary Canadian wheat board, but no one here believes that this effort is genuine. It is just because the government is afraid to say it is going to abolish the whole thing. It wants to make it seem like it is in steps. The voluntary aspect of the Canadian Wheat Board is merely a way for the government to say it is not completely abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board in one fell swoop.

The Canadian Wheat Board is good for Canada and it is also good for small farmers. This is what we would evaluate in terms of outcomes. If the government manages to pass Bill C-18, how many small farmers will be left in five years? I think that is the important thing to measure.

We need to look at whether the majority government is running roughshod over the will of local farmers. In five years when we look at this and we see all these family farms that have collapsed, we will have to ask if this was the right thing to do.

Our opposition day motion states that we should let farmers have a voice as is mandated in the act. That is what I will speak to here in terms of process.

Probably the most egregious part of Bill C-18 is the process by which the government is attempting to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board. It is worth looking at the Canadian Wheat Board Act to see what the process is supposed to be and then contrast it with what the government is actually doing.

Section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act states:

The Minister shall not cause to be introduced in Parliament a bill that would exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley, or wheat or barley produced in any area in Canada, from the provisions of Part IV, either in whole or in part, or generally, or for any period, or that would extend the application—

There are lots of subsections and lots of things the minister has to pay attention to. The government cannot introduce any changes without consulting with the Wheat Board.

Business of Supply

Second and most important:

- (b) the producers of the grain have voted in favour of the exclusion or extension, the voting process having been determined by the Minister.

What this section outlines is there has to be a plebiscite. This is enshrined in law. In fact the Conservatives themselves used this under a former government.

This is an act by which the government will be judged. It is going to destroy local farms. In five years we are going to see a lot fewer family farms on the Prairies.

The government is showing Canadians how it approaches democracy in this country. Even though it is mandated to have a plebiscite, the government ignores this requirement. This goes against the traditions of the Conservative Party itself.

The Reform Party and the Alliance Party that make up the Conservative Party fought in this House to increase Canadian democracy. I applaud them for that. In fact, Randy White brought in private members' bills to bring in a recall initiative. This goes against that tradition. I am very upset about that and I think Canadians will be, too.

• (1150)

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Madam Speaker, in regard to the member's point on the clear question, I point to the platform promises. The NDP was clear in the election campaign that it would support the Canadian Wheat Board as a single desk marketer for Canadian wheat and barley. The Conservative Party platform in the entire paragraph under the Canadian Wheat Board said that we will continue to work with western Canadian grain farmers to ensure that the results of the barley plebiscite are respected and that they are given the freedom to choose whether to sell grain on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board.

That was the complete promise in the election platform of the Conservative Party. That is exactly what we are doing now. Based on that promise and the clarity of that promise, and based on the overwhelming support in western Canada for the Conservative Party which won 51 of the 56 seats in the prairie provinces, why does the member not support democracy? While he is on his feet maybe he could tell us how many farmers in Burnaby—Douglas are affected by the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, 32,000 farmers participated in an ad hoc plebiscite which the Canadian Wheat Board hosted. Almost 23,000 voted to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. This shows at the very least that the government should respect the Canadian Wheat Board Act and hold a plebiscite. Today one of the member's colleagues supported that notion and I would hope he would too.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Madam Speaker, we have trends in farming that worry many of the producers in my constituency. Since 1988, Canada's farm debt has tripled. We lost 80,000 farms and saw a dramatic drop in the number of young farmers. My colleague spoke about that a few minutes ago.

Farmers tell me these phenomena are the product of an agricultural policy that only values the big corporate interests and lacks appropriate incentives to help young people see the family farm as a viable way of life. They ask me, why is the government siding with big agriculture to the detriment of the family farm? Could my colleague speak again to that element of this debate which he spoke to eloquently a while ago?

I want to commend him for filling the shoes of the previous NDP member for Burnaby—Douglas. He is doing a great job.

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for her kind words.

We have heard there are 70,000 western farmers currently, but I wonder how many there will be in five years. I wonder if in five years the Conservatives will say that this was a mistake. When the number of farms goes from 70,000 to 60,000 to 50,000 down to 20,000 or 10,000 and they are giant agribusiness companies which are owned outside Canada, I wonder if the Conservatives will say that this was a mistake.

•(1155)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas for his speech.

Bill C-18, as proposed by the government, should be scrapped, simply because it jeopardizes the financial stability of western wheat farmers and of all families associated with the sector.

Can the member tell us what the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board will mean for farmers?

[English]

Mr. Kennedy Stewart: Madam Speaker, it is similar to losing any business. I think that many families on the Prairies are going to be devastated by the bill and the rather rash action by the government. All the time we hear the Conservatives talk about a strong and stable majority government. I do not understand why the Conservatives are afraid of abiding by the act and having a plebiscite.

Farmers should have a say in this. We will see fewer and fewer farmers if the bill is passed.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Madam Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak in favour of our motion today.

This is an opportunity for the Conservative government to restore faith with the Canadian public and save an institution that has served farmers so well. Although it is seen as a success story around the world, the Canadian Wheat Board is being attacked by Conservatives with an ideologically driven agenda that favours wealthy middlemen at the expense of Canadian farmers.

The Canadian Wheat Board helps to ensure that farmers can sell their grain to the right buyer and that it can be transported effectively to that buyer. We live in a big country and a co-operative approach to accessing markets is a hallmark of our Canadian experience. Now is the time for us to once again commit ourselves to that co-operative approach and uphold our values in the face of corporate greed. In Canada, co-operation has allowed this country to survive and our co-operative approach is not only demonstrated by the wish of our farmers, it is also, frankly, sound economics.

Allen Oberg, a farmer and Canadian Wheat Board chair of the board of directors, stated recently that dismantling the Wheat Board single desk will "jeopardize a \$5 billion export sector. It will shift money from the pockets of Canadian farmers into the hands of American corporations".

Enriching foreign corporations at the expense of our farmers does not seem like good, sound economic management to me. It sounds like the Conservative government is deliberately risking the impoverishment of our farmers in order to benefit foreign corporations that do not need our help.

Results of a recent Canadian Wheat Board ad hoc plebiscite indicated that 62% of farmers voted in favour of retaining the single desk for wheat. The majority voted to retain it for barley also. With over 38,000 farmers participating, this plebiscite is clearly indicative of the popular vote.

As a gesture of good faith, before any changes are made to the Canadian Wheat Board, the government should study the impact that dismantling the single desk would have on our farmers and economy. The Conservative government should stop its single-minded approach and hear the objections of our farmers and their families. Farm families deserve the government's support far more than a bunch of wealthy agri-business middlemen.

However, the Conservative government seems to lack the will to reflect on its actions. Single-mindedness has led to a complete lack of openness to hearing the other points of view. It certainly has no intention of allowing debate to slow the Conservative express train's transfer of our grain to big city corporate interests.

For example, we had only been debating the bill on eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board single desk for a single day when the government decided to invoke closure and stifle debate. This has to be some sort of a record. The Conservatives are prepared to stifle debate and silence opposition, but to what end? These Conservative Party members used to tell us that they would do things differently and would encourage healthy debate. They seem to have changed their tune.

I will repeat what I said in this House only a few days ago. On March 31, 2004, the leader of the Conservative Party, then in opposition, stated, "The government invoked closure in the House after only six days".

The leader of the Conservative Party was clearly incensed that a government would be so callous as to invoke closure after only six days of debate that he was willing to call the governing party on it. I completely agree, but the Prime Minister should heed his own advice and reopen the debate on this undemocratic move.

Business of Supply

What is the point in forcing an end to debate when the fundamental issue of farmers' rights to decide for themselves has clearly not been heard? The Conservative government seems to have a tin ear when it comes to regional needs. What was its slogan in the last election?

•(1200)

[*Translation*]

"Our region in power." It seems to me that the real region in power, at least in the eyes of the Conservative government, is the one between the minister and the boards of multinationals.

The Conservatives seem focused on attacking our regions and everything that affects the families of small and medium-sized producers. In my riding, fishers are the biggest producers of food products. Yet, the government has eliminated the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, which was created in partnership with our fishers. This council was created in 1993, after the cod moratorium was announced, in order to determine exactly what the situation was with fish stocks. Each year, the council took a stock inventory, and fishing quotas were based on that data. It was a wonderful example of co-operation between the government and fishers. It was an independent body that generated reliable data. It was because of this partnership with fishers that the council was so successful at helping us manage a crucial resource for eastern Canada's fishers. The council has a proven track record, yet the government shut it down without any warning.

If we do not support the single desk system that is the Canadian Wheat Board, small producers, fishers and fish plant workers, as well as western farmers and their families, will be the ones who suffer the consequences.

The effect that this will have on grain farmers is not our only concern. We must also think about the spinoffs generated by the Canadian Wheat Board. One example of many is access to railway services. The construction of the railway to Churchill, Manitoba, was completed in 1929. Today, the Canadian Wheat Board is by far the largest user of the Port of Churchill, with its shipments accounting for 95% of the port's cargo. Grain is transported by railway in producer cars at an affordable price.

Without a single desk system, it is doubtful that the Wheat Board's competitors will want to use the Port of Churchill as much as the board does since they have their own port facilities on the west coast and in Thunder Bay. The Port of Churchill does not interest them. We believe that they will even want to favour their own facilities elsewhere. The Port of Churchill and the railway will be at risk if we do not protect the single desk system.

The railway in my riding is also at risk. Most of the forestry companies have shut down, and we find ourselves with a railway whose only reliable customers are passengers. Given the privatization of our railway by CN, like the privatization of the railway leading to Churchill in favour of Omnitrax, the railway must be profitable to be attractive to private companies.

We are not questioning the fact that the main routes must be profitable. They are subsidized without too many questions being asked but, to date, it does not seem as though this government is terribly concerned about the railways.

The people in my riding have been reflecting on our railway. Similarly, the people of northern Manitoba should consider how viable their railway will be if the Canadian Wheat Board single desk system is not supported.

The Wheat Board has a much greater role than simply managing the transportation and sale of grain. The Wheat Board supports the economy and infrastructure of a number of communities.

•(1205)

[*English*]

Canada's northern infrastructure is at risk. Our northern railways and the Port of Churchill have taken years to develop and communities have been built around them. Yet, the Conservative government is telling people who depend upon them and their largest client to just go and let the port shove off.

Removing the single desk will risk lower grain prices for producers, which means that farmers will suffer. Farmers may leave the industry. The lower prices will certainly not be passed on to consumers. No. Experience tells us that middlemen, the large corporate agri-business interests, will profit from lower prices and they will not pass on their savings.

The Conservative members are so fixated on their ideologically-driven agenda, they have become deaf to the voices of the farmers, the very people they claim to be helping. Clearly, it is not the needs of the farmers that are being addressed here. It is the desire of large foreign-owned corporations to have cheap access to our grain. It does not need to be this way.

In taking away farmers' rights without real debate, the Conservative government has proven that it has become too self-righteous for its own good. Against such opposition, how can the Conservatives remain deaf to the needs of farmers? We need a plebiscite, the law requires it, and it is only right.

Mr. Mike Lake (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sensing a pattern here. All day long we are going to hear NDP member after NDP member from non-prairie provinces stand up and make arguments as to why prairie farmers should be forced to sell their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board.

There is some kind of vague talk of democracy over there, but the reality is that during the election campaign this Conservative government made a clear promise and that promise was that we would work to ensure that western Canadian grain farmers "are given the freedom to choose whether to sell grain on the open market or through the Canadian Wheat Board". We hear NDP member after NDP member asserting that they understand that this is an important issue to western Canadian farmers.

Given the facts that we made a clear promise and that the issue is important to western Canadian farmers, I would ask why NDP members do not respect the results of the election? If we look at, for example, the margin of victory in the rural ridings in Manitoba we will see: Provencher, 70.56% Conservative; Brandon—Souris, 63.77% Conservative; Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, 63% Conservative; Selkirk—Interlake, 65% Conservative; and Portage—Lisgar, 76% Conservative.

Business of Supply

Why does the NDP not respect the results of the last election?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, we certainly do want to respect the results of the last election. It is clear that the government has the right to introduce bills. However, the government should also respect the rights of democracy in Canada and allow those bills to be debated in a timely fashion.

Over 38,000 farmers participated in an ad hoc plebiscite. Well over a majority spoke and made their intentions clear. They want to save the single desk. The Conservative government's proposal in Bill C-18 is right off the mark and the government needs to listen to the farmers who it claims to so well represent. The government needs to bring those farmers' ideas forward and it needs to protect farmers' rights to continue to farm on their family farms.

Bill C-18 would not help farmers whatsoever. It would challenge farmers' families in the future. We expect that people will have to leave their family farms if we allow Bill C-18 to pass. It is not a democratic move. It is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please. I would like to give the member more time, but I am sure there are other hon. members who may have questions.

The hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I received an email a while back from a farmer from Manitoulin Island, Ross Joyce of Spring Bay. He wants to transition his farm to certified organic and is concerned that GMO canola has started to grow on his land. He is worried about his operation and also about the impending battle he might have with Monsanto.

He wrote, "Monsanto has the rights to their technology and achieving financial compensation if those rights are infringed upon". He is seeking similar rights. He is basically saying that if its technology shows up in areas where it is not supposed to, similarly, if its technology infringes on his income, then he should have the right to compensation.

He is looking for a reciprocal law if big agriculture can take action against a farmer to protect its interests he feels he should have the same protection available to him. To me, this is just another example of how the deck has been stacked against the family farm, and how our agricultural policy is fully and completely on the big side of agriculture companies.

I am wondering if the hon. member would agree with that.

•(1210)

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, it is certainly true that the challenge of family farms in this country is massive. We need to support them in any way, shape or form we can.

Agri-business already has a leg up. It does not need more support from the government. We need to have policies that are clearly designed to help the people of this country weather the storms that are ahead of them and give them all the tools that they need. That means supporting the single desk.

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I generally do not thank opposition parties for all they do, but I have to thank them for continuing to bring the debate on the Canadian

Wheat Board to the floor of the House of Commons. This is an issue which is fairly dear to my heart and as I get into my speech everyone will understand why. It is also an issue I am very familiar with.

Before I get into my speech, I need to say a couple of things.

I need to thank the translators who are going to translate my speech. I have a habit of not handing in proper speaking notes and therefore I am a bit more of a challenge for them than most members.

I also want to thank the Prime Minister. Many people have noted he has a particular passion on this issue, and yet he is not from a rural background. To use a term that is used back home, he is a city boy. However, he understands that this is a fundamental issue. It is an issue about freedom and one that goes to the essence and core of who people are in western Canada and the Prairies. I want to extend a special thanks to the Prime Minister, much more than the general thanks members often give to their party leaders. For someone who has represented Calgary in the House of Commons and who originally comes from Etobicoke, he has taken true leadership on this issue.

As I was saying when I began my speech, this is an issue which I understand personally. It is an issue that relates to the history of my family. I come from a prairie riding. The constituency of Saskatoon—Humboldt is now one-third rural and about two-thirds urban, representing the city of Saskatoon, but it is still very deeply tied to the agriculture industry. It is very much about the people I represent, but it is so much more than that for me because this is the story of my family and how they came to Canada.

On my mother's side, my great-grandpa first settled in what was then the Northwest Territories, coming from Manitoba to take up a homestead in the year 1900 in the Hague district of Saskatchewan. That was a time when people looked forward to the great opportunities the Prairies offered. It was before Saskatchewan was a province. Canada was still in its early formation. He settled there because it was about having his own property and freedom. He was born in the Ukraine, Russia and came to a place where he could actually make his own living.

On my father's side of the family tree, my great-grandfather, my grandfather and my dad also farmed in the eastern section of Saskatchewan. I farmed with my dad for a short time. They originally came from Yevpatoriya, Russia via Germany to settle in that area. Coincidentally, and this is interesting, one of the first pieces of land they bought had been owned by Charles Dunning, who later became the premier of Saskatchewan. I guess I am not the first farmer who did not succeed in farming and went into politics. There is a bit of a history.

That is the story. They began to farm, not as opposition members have talked about as big or grand farmers. My dad, my Uncle Ronnie and Uncle Bernie never were big farmers. They were small farmers. My great-grandfather and grandfather were very much the poorest of the poor farmers having come from a prisoner-of-war misplaced persons camp in Germany after the first world war. This is their story. This is a story of prairie people.

Business of Supply

Many people from eastern and northern Europe who came to Canada never had the right or ability to own their own land, to own what was theirs. It was either collectivized in later years by the communist socialist governments of eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union or by the more futile enterprises of the Austro-Hungarian czarist empire. It was very important to people to own their own land and control their own produce in order to make a living and a future for themselves.

•(1215)

Other provinces were created on the Prairies, but my family farms in the province of Saskatchewan. Farmers began to work together to increase their ability to market their grain to get a better livelihood for themselves.

Although my hon. colleagues across the way have noted the various co-operatives, the pools and various things like that, they failed to mention the institutions like UGG, United Grain Growers, the various pools, Saskatchewan Wheat Pool, Alberta Wheat Pool and Manitoba Pool Elevators. These were voluntary institutions. The various agrarian and farm organizations got together voluntarily to pool their efforts. That history is often forgotten when we talk about the Canadian Wheat Board.

The legislation the government is proposing, which the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food introduced and the Conservative members of the House are supporting, is not a bill to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board. It is a bill to eliminate the monopoly provisions contained in the act so that farmers will have the freedom to market their own grain and to return the Wheat Board to a more voluntary institution.

As time goes on, we will see what that voluntary institution is. It possibly will be another co-operative, a re-creation in the same spirit of UGG and the wheat pools from which the original Wheat Board itself was created. We are not quite sure at this point, but it is a possibility.

It needs to be remembered that when the original Wheat Board was created and modified in various forms it did not originally have these monopoly provisions. The Wheat Board began to acquire its monopoly provisions in the 1940s and its ability to control the price of grains, and currently it is for wheat, malt and barley, but it included other commodities during World War II. Corn, sunflower and various other crops come to mind. In 1941 the government of the day gave the Canadian Wheat Board the ability to cap prices and to control the prices. The monopoly provision came to be during the second world war. In 1943, the War Measures Act made selling through the Canadian Wheat Board compulsory.

Members of the House need to understand the co-operative nature of original prairie agrarian institutions, the wheat pools, the UGGs, the original Wheat Board, was very different from the monopoly provisions that were brought in in the 1940s. Those monopoly provisions were put in under the War Measures Act to assist in the Canadian war effort during World War II. They were not put in for the good of farmers.

As the war ended and the provisions in the act came up for review every five years, they would be renewed by the House until 1965, when they were made permanent.

The crops and various other aspects of the Wheat Board have changed over the years. Oats were removed from the purview of the Wheat Board, as were some of the other crops that I mentioned earlier. Since Charlie Mayer, a former minister responsible for the Wheat Board removed oats from it, we have seen how that market has succeeded and grown in western Canada.

Something that needs to be fundamentally understood and grasped is that originally, the Canadian Wheat Board was not a monopoly organization. It was not compulsory. That is fundamentally what we are trying for today.

To bring some present day reality to this debate, I phoned one of my relatives who is still farming, my cousin Dwight in the Yorkton area, and talked with him about the value of it. He was pretty matter of fact. Like a lot of younger farmers, he has moved on from wheat being the dominant crop for making his living. He has gone to canola and flax. Dwight has always been more inventive and a lot more active on various things than either my dad or his dad was. I asked him about grain prices, because I am not as in touch with grain prices as I was when I hauled grain for my dad a few years ago. He said it cost him about \$1.50 a bushel right now for losses between what he could market his grain for to the Ontario and Minneapolis markets as to what he would be getting from the Wheat Board. That does not sound like a whole lot, but when the overall price is in the neighbourhood of \$6 or \$7 a bushel, getting an extra \$1.50 means quite a lot.

•(1220)

When they look at the final profit margin, this is very important. That is the economic argument many farmers have been making.

It is not purely the economic argument I am making today in the House. There are broader issues for my family members and for constituents to be more prosperous. There is a broader fundamental issue that needs to be addressed which actually extends it beyond the farmers and agriculture industry to all Canadians.

Most Canadians, myself among them, understand that parties are not perfect ideological or philosophical creatures. However, they do fall into general broad categories.

The opposition New Democratic Party likes to call itself a social democratic party for the particular brand of socialism that it espouses. If we listen to its members' underlying rhetoric, they tend to talk a lot about fairness, which is often a fairly subjective criterion. However, it tends to be in their discourse and that of their supporters.

Business of Supply

As with all socialist movements, they tend to be concerned not so much about the creation of wealth but the redistribution of it. They view that the role of the government, an entity set up by the state, is to level the playing field with respect to economic fairness and redistribution. That is why a monopolistic single desk Canadian Wheat Board that would send people to jail for selling their own wheat in their own way fits so clearly with their political philosophy. It is something that meshes with the purpose of the state not being to protect any basic rights but being to collectivize, to spread out and to redistribute wealth.

Parties that tend to be more attuned to free enterprise and at least espouse that, understandably not always perfectly, tend toward the more classical liberal tradition of parliamentary discourse. They believe that the whole purpose of the state is to protect life, liberty and property. We see this in our government's approach to how we are dealing with the Canadian Wheat Board.

People who grew up on a family farm understand very clearly that farming is not just another business. It is not a trade that someone goes into. My dad and my grandpa started farming with their dads. I was driving a tractor, doing summer fallow and hauling grain well before I was legally able to drive vehicles on the bigger roadways. That was part of who I was. When I was six or seven years old, I remember working with my father on the farm. While I might not have been all that helpful, from my perspective it was a total part of my life.

For farmers, this is a fundamental element of who they are as individuals. It is about their liberty. It is about their property. We need to understand that many of the eastern and northern European farmers settled in western Canada because they wanted to have that very bit of property they had been denied. To them it meant freedom. Yet in the Canadian Wheat Board we see this contradiction that the government can effectively collectivize and take away their property, their wheat. They grew their wheat. They produced their wheat. Why can they not market their wheat? If they want to voluntarily join with another group in a co-operative, as was done with the UGG, the wheat pools, the original wheat board, that should be their choice.

That is the fundamental issue we come to. That is why our party, with that broad perception of life, liberty and property, is very interested in defending the rights of farmers to protect their right to market.

There are a couple of issues which my hon. colleagues across the aisle have dealt with. Their main talking point today seems to be the Wheat Board survey that showed a majority of respondents supporting a single desk. I would like to note a couple of things for people who are not familiar with this.

Most people who are engaged in politics know it is much easier to win a vote if the electoral pool can be defined, the question can be chosen and no one campaigns against them. That is effectively what happened with the Wheat Board survey.

•(1225)

On the barley question, a mere 51% said "yes", which, considering how the vote was done, is effectively an admission of full defeat, because the question was, "Do you want to abolish the Wheat Board or do you want to keep the Wheat Board?"

That is not the question the government is offering in this legislation. It is asking farmers whether they want to keep a Wheat Board through which they can work together with other farmers on a voluntary basis or whether they want the freedom to do what they want with their own personal property. We are taking away the punishment of imprisonment and fines for farmers selling their own wheat.

The second thing I want to deal with is the argument on the other side that this is all about big business, big farms and eliminating the small producer.

My dad was a very small producer. He did other things to make ends meet. He worked as a janitor, did church work and even taught for a few years, because he has his education degree from the University of Saskatchewan. All my uncles who farmed were small farmers too. They all chafed under the oppression of the Wheat Board. They never had that freedom or ability to do it.

As younger farmers, people like my cousin Dwight, grew up, they began to deal with the Wheat Board in a very practical way. They began to grow other crops and look for ways to get around it.

It is not about defending the rights of the large corporations. When we look at what is done there, large corporations did not have to get out there and deal competitively for farmers' wheat, but companies actually have to get out there and create incentives for farmers to grow the other crops they want the farmers to grow. This is something that is not always understood. Maltsters dealing only with malting barley only ever had to deal with the Wheat Board. Companies never had to go out there and give farmers incentives for dealing with them rather than a competitor, because they knew the Wheat Board would offer one basic price and one basic deal to all the brewers of Canada.

We see this in western Canada. There is not one grain company that dominates. We have Viterra, descendant of the wheat pools; we have Parrish and Heimbecker; we have Great Northern Grain Terminals, and we have Pioneer. These companies have flourished over the years; now it is time for these companies to actually compete and go after farmers' wheat.

Business of Supply

Some members of the opposition have been stating that with the loss of the Wheat Board there would be major negative effects on the railway system, on the transportation system and on producer cars. I would like to state clearly that producers would continue to have access to producer cars, to elevators and to ports and terminals. It is important to know that these producer cars would continue to be allocated by the Canadian Grain Commission and access to them would continue to be protected by the Canadian Grain Act. Short-line railways and in-land terminals, noted in one of the earlier speeches, would continue to play an important role in getting western Canadian wheat and barley to both domestic and international markets. The Canadian Grain Commission would also continue to protect the quality of Canadian wheat and barley. These things would not go away. We would continue to have short-line railways, producer cars, the Canadian Grain Commission and other aspects of the Canadian grain system that we have come to know.

The one and only thing we would remove in this legislation is the monopoly provisions. This is something that I support because it is about fundamental freedom and because at the end of the day it would improve the farmers' bottom line. It would force grain companies to compete for their wheat. It would provide for more innovation and more diversity. It would support the growth of value added, which would also continue to add to the farmers' bottom line.

As a son, grandson and great-grandson of a small prairie farmer, I am very pleased today to support my Minister of Agriculture, my party and my Prime Minister in the removal of the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board.

•(1230)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand to remind the hon. member that the principles of this country are not life, liberty and property, but peace, order and good government. I believe that the Canadian Wheat Board fits under the principles of that last element of the founding principles of our country, good government.

I appreciate that the member shared with us a story of his past and of his family. It adds a human touch to the laws that we debate in the House, but I would ask why his party chose to abort the debate somewhat early.

I would also remind him that we often take what we have for granted until it is gone. What was the motivation for the original co-operatives that were formed? Was it not to give farmers the powers to be competitive against strong private monopolies that existed at the turn of the century? These private monopolies that we are going to be exchanging for might have the effect of eroding prices and the market security of western farmers.

Could the member address those questions?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I will start with my colleague's remark about good government. I think the Conservative Party and the NDP have very different perspectives on what good government is. Good government has been defined quite differently. Since I come from a family that tended to vote Social Credit, my definition of good government tended to be what E.C. Manning did in Alberta for many years, while I am sure the hon. member has more kind words to say about Premier Dougals of Saskatchewan.

The member's remarks about prairie co-operatives were very instructive, but that is the point that I was making. Farmers put themselves together voluntarily to do what they needed to do. My dad delivered to the wheat pool for many years, but he also delivered to Pioneer and to Parrish and Heimbecker as well. That was his voluntary choice. Both the private companies, Pioneer and P and H, gave him good service, as did the co-operative. Having all these players together in the grain system is what made his farming operation more successful and provided greater return for him and his neighbours.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the New Democrats at the transport committee yesterday thought that Saskatoon was a small Saskatchewan town. Not only did the member not understand what small-town rural Saskatchewan looks like, but those members clearly do not understand this issue from the perspective of the western farmer.

In Ontario we have marketing choice. I want to welcome my colleague and his constituents, who are on the verge now of entering that era of marketing choice. Could he talk about some of the restrictions that will now be gone for western farmers and the benefits they will enjoy like Ontario farmers?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, this is one thing that people outside the industry do not particularly understand. Farmers can go to prison for marketing their own wheat. When this legislation has passed, one of the benefits will be that farmers who live in southern Saskatchewan and produce durum, a type of wheat that is used predominantly for pasta, will be able to market their grain across the border into the United States. They will be able to sell it not at the depressed cheap prices that the Wheat Board would use to dump the grain, but at the highest possible market price.

Farmers will have the choice. They will have grain brokers and terminals in North Dakota, Minnesota and Montana. They can compete and have those people bidding for their grain. That is one tangible benefit. If any group of farmers has taken major financial hits over the years, it is the durum growers.

•(1235)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Saskatoon—Humboldt for his speech. I learned a lot about his family and I know him a little better, which is very interesting.

According to the results of the plebiscite conducted by the Canadian Wheat Board, 62% of those who participated voted to maintain the board. If the board had not existed when the member's father was a small farmer, would his father have been able to succeed and would the member even have had the opportunity to come here to the House?

Business of Supply

[*English*]

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, that is the exact point I was making. One of the things that held back the prosperity of my father and my uncles and that was one of the reasons I decided not to go into the industry after farming a couple of years with my father was the lack of diversity that the Canadian Wheat Board caused.

Having to sell into the monopoly system of the Canadian Wheat Board held back processing of our grain into various flours and pastas in value-added plants on the Prairies. That diminished the return to farmers at the farm gate.

If we have to ship our product all the way overseas or to Ontario or to somewhere else—to wherever the Wheat Board has its contracts—and do not have local competitors able to buy directly from the farm gate, it is more difficult to make a living. It lowers the value of our crop and therefore lowers the value of our land and the ability for people like me to take over the farm from our parents.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have heard a lot from across the floor about how this is going to be a disaster for the small farm and the farmers in western Canada.

I would like to ask my hon. colleague, who obviously has the background, why the opposition places so little faith in the ability of farmers in western Canada to compete and prosper. What is the member's view on farmers' ability to do just that?

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, I can only speculate as to the reasoning. Probably the number one reason is a lack of intimate familiarity with the issues and culture. While there are many good members across the way, they do not quite have the nuanced knowledge that is sometimes helpful when it comes to debates like this.

The other thing I will note is that unfortunately we are probably going to see the number of farmers dropping off as the years go on. That is because the demographics show that farmers are considerably older than the general workplace population.

Starting in roughly the mid-1980s and extending for about 20 years, agriculture prices in prairie commodities were very poor, with the exception of a few open market commodities like canola. That has caused younger farmers, such as I once was, to drop out of the industry, and the age of the agriculture producer to rise dramatically.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt for allowing us to share some of his experiences with farm life. It is important to share that in this House for those who have not had the opportunity to have farm life.

I know that Saskatoon is indeed a city, and a substantial one. Since I actually represent a rural piece of southern Ontario with a lot of small communities, I understand that.

When we talk about marketing freedom, the other side talks in glowing terms about the upside. Perhaps the member could explain to us in real terms, because he has those experiences, that the market does not always go up. Every market, regardless of what it is for or whatever commodity it happens to be, goes up and goes down.

Perhaps the member could enlighten us on what he sees as the potential of the shortfalls we could see, similar to what happened in

Australia. We see that premiums for Australian wheat growers under the Australian Wheat Board diminished from almost \$99 to less than \$27 below the American price per ton. They have actually taken a hit in an open market. They have not always gone forward in an open market.

It is said that markets are self-correcting, so there is not always an upward trajectory; there is indeed a downward portion. Perhaps the member could enlighten us on that aspect.

Mr. Brad Trost: Mr. Speaker, the member gets directly to what I was stating in response to an earlier question.

For 20 years, most of the crops on the Prairies have not been financially successful for most farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board, over the last 20 years, when I would have been of an age to take over the farm from my father, did not protect farmers from the market. It did absolutely nothing. It just pooled the losses to make them lower. It made sure everyone lost money.

The government has taken ways to protect farmers from losses and to smooth out the market in its agri suite of programs, such as AgriStability, AgriRecovery, and programs like that.

All the Wheat Board did was smooth out all the losses. It did not protect, in any way, shape or form, farmers from the downside of the market in wheat, barley and other crops over the years.

• (1240)

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join in the debate. I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

This is a critical issue for farmers. I do not think we should make any mistake or have any illusions about this. Clearly, we are talking about the future of the farm family in western Canada. It is within our power to make a decision on their behalf as to the direction in which they ultimately go forward, whether it is under the single desk, as is presently the case, or under a market deregulation, as my friends on the other side have constantly talked about.

The one group that we seem to be missing in the middle of all this is the group that will be directly affected. Some of our colleagues will be directly affected because they are farmers on the Prairies and they grow grain. They will understand that impact as far as how they want to decide to move forward or to move in a different direction without the Wheat Board.

However, for all those folks who are farmers on the Prairies and who are not here, they deserve that we take the time to listen to them because, ultimately, it is their livelihoods and their farms that we are talking about. We are not doing it necessarily in a vacuum.

I know some friends and colleagues on the other side have farmers in their communities and in their ridings who are saying what direction they want us to go in. However, on the flip side of that coin, there are also farmers within their own ridings who are saying that they do not want to go in that direction.

Business of Supply

How does one balance the competing interests between those farmers who are legitimately saying, and there is no question that they are, that they do not want to be a member of the Wheat Board any more?

I have heard the minister and others say it, and some have voted with their air sprayers, their air seeders. However, one can debate whether they decided to get out of wheat and go to canola or go to another crop based on the Wheat Board or based on the fact that, regardless, it was an open market and there might have been more money in canola anyway. It is not really a false argument. It just does not overlap and take into consideration everything that happens.

There is no doubt that the rotation of crops, new crops, how folks decide to do things and how they make the decision on the ground is their right. However, ultimately, why do we not engage them? Some will say that May 2 was our engagement process. The government has been fond of asking myself and my colleagues on a number of occasions what the member for Welland has in common with prairie wheat farmers, or what a member from Vancouver or a member from another large city has in common.

I would suggest to my friends on the other side that members from Calgary, Edmonton or any other major city would have a similar interest, like I, with Canadian wheat farmers. It is no different. Whether folks selected one particular party over another in a particular area was not specific to that question necessarily, as to how people voted because there were more than farmers voting.

It is a little spurious and a bit of a reach to suggest that the Conservatives have a mandate based on one question, on a large platform that talked about many things, that engaged all kinds of folks beyond just farmers but yet we can take the opportunity to ask them. What I would suggest to my friends is that we figure out what question we want to ask them. I have heard from the other side that they want a third option. We need to debate the question that we put to farmers in western Canada who are directly affected and ask them what they want.

In Ontario, my friend from Essex said that there is market freedom in Ontario because farmers decided that. He said that it was not a move by the federal government because it had no jurisdiction. The minister pointed out earlier that the federal government had no jurisdiction over Ontario farmers. The province did but it was the farmers who chose. The province did not tell them what they had to do in that jurisdiction. It allowed Ontario farmers to make a choice. They made a choice and went forward with that choice. It was their right to do so.

•(1245)

We on this side of the House are not standing in the way of western farmers. In fact, it is the opposite. We are standing with them in saying that the government should allow them to make the choice. Surely we all understand that it is the farmers' right to have the choice because at the end of the day it has a direct impact on them.

My colleague for Saskatoon—Humboldt talked earlier about his farming family, his great-grandfather, grandfather, father and uncles who have farmed. He gave us that nuanced piece in order for us to understand what it is like. There is no question that there are grievances. Folks did go to jail and people did feel they were treated

unfairly, which should never have happened to them. However, now that we know all of those things, there are ways to ensure we fix it and part of our responsibility is to find a way to do that.

We can only use the plebiscite because the government refuses to actually put a question to farmers. The plebiscite is not quite the only tool but it is one of the tools we have. We can see that 62% of farmers want to keep the single desk. We have a smaller group that did not vote, and we are assuming that it did not want to. However, if we assume that is the case, then we have a majority of folks saying one thing and a minority saying the other. How do we engage the majority of folks? We simply apply what the minority wants against the majority situation and say that it is democracy. It is strange that I do not remember learning that in political science class but maybe that is how it is supposed to work in the government's perspective. However, I always assumed that when we looked at a vote, we took democracy in hand and took the majority vote, but that is yet to be seen.

When we look at this democratic process, the amazing thing is that the Conservatives are using words like "tyranny" and "oppression". Tyranny happened in Libya until we saw the end of Gadhafi. Tyranny and oppression happens in Iran. To suggest that there is something tyrannical or oppressive about the Canadian Wheat Board in the same sentence seems to be a bit of a dichotomy in how we use the language. "Unfair" may be a reasonable word to use about the Canadian Wheat Board for those who do not believe in the single desk. However, to escalate the language to "tyrannical" or "the tyranny of the Canadian Wheat Board", my goodness, one would think, if that were the case, that people were actually being removed from their land, such as what happened in the Ukraine under Stalin. That is not happening.

What is happening is that folks are asking to be given a choice. We see folks on the Prairies who are clearly upset with the direction of the government. They are making their voices heard and are asking for the opportunity to vote. On this side of the House, we are saying that if the government conducts the vote, we will abide by the farmers' wishes. What could be more democratic than that?

Many of my friends on the other side came here at one point with the old Reform Party and actually used to say things like, "I'll ask my constituents". In fact, they even went so far as to suggest that maybe the constituents should have a recall provision because that is democratic. I do not know what happened to their roots but they clearly lost them along the way in becoming Conservatives. They do not want to go back and talk to their constituents, the folks who are directly affected, the farmers who produce wheat on the Prairies of this country, and ask them directly what they want and then respect their wishes. On this side, we would do that.

Business of Supply

We reach out to members on the other side and ask them to join us in the quest of finding out what farmers want so that we can respect their wishes one way or the other. It does not need to be what we are asking for. Indeed, it could be that the Conservatives are right, but let us find out. If they are right, then we will stop, but perhaps they are not. If that is the case, then they should respect the wishes of farmers, just as we would if they are right. That is how the democratic process works and that is what we fight for. It is why we ask the brave men and women of this country to go overseas, as the government has pointed out to us on numerous occasions, to help them protect themselves and eventually garner democracy.

I implore the government to simply allow western farmers to have that voice and allow them to vote on their future because it is their future.

• (1250)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite has gone on and on about whether we know the real wishes of western Canadian farmers. For everyone listening to this debate and for everyone in the House, we have taken countless measures to ensure the aspirations of western Canadian farmers are not subject to a monopoly for the marketing of their grain. They want to be treated the way farmers are treated in the rest of the country. We saw that on May 2 with the clear expression in our platform of our intention to move ahead with this. We have seen it by countless other measures.

What the hon. member and no other member on that side of the House has answered is why they persist in thinking that these farmers should face the handicap of a monopoly. Throughout Europe, even in Ukraine and Russia, the places where the planned economy, especially in agriculture, flourished for most the 20th century, monopoly no longer exists. It does not exist in Australia and it does not exist in the United States. Could the hon. member tell us why it should exist in western Canada?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, we are not insisting that it continue either. We are saying that farmers should choose whether it exists or not. We are asking the government to let them have a chance to vote. It is not on our insistence that the Canadian Wheat Board stay on for perpetuity. We are asking the government to have an honest question that we can agree upon in the House, allow the farmers to have an honest vote and let them decide. Farmers will decide, not us on this side and not members on that side, but farmers. Canadian wheat producing farmers on the Prairies will make the decision on an honest question.

It is not my party that is saying that the Wheat Board must continue. We are simply saying that farmers should be given the opportunity to make a decision. If it is their choice to continue, then that is fine, but, if it is not, that is also fine.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulages, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have heard, on a few occasions, government members describing Canadian values as life, liberty and property, which are more in tune with the founding values of the nation to our south. As the hon. member knows, the founding principles and values of our nation are peace, order and good government, or conversely, peace, welfare and good government. They were used interchangeably in the 19th century. Welfare here refers to the common good.

How would preserving the Canadian Wheat Board fit with the values and principles that our country holds to be true? How would a private monopoly, which would probably take place once we scrap the Wheat Board, be even harder to get out of than the Wheat Board that we have now?

Mr. Malcolm Allen: Mr. Speaker, the member is absolutely right about life, liberty and private property ownership.

Our sense of working together collectively and in harmony and unison for the better good of our communities is something we hold near and dear to our hearts. It is emulated with the folks who are part of the Wheat Board because they can get out.

As the Minister of Agriculture said, farmers can vote with their air seeders and do something else. No one is making them grow wheat. There is no one on the Prairies who said thou shall grow wheat always. No one makes them do that. There is no oppression from the Wheat Board on that aspect. If they all want to grow canola tomorrow, they can do that if they so choose, or they can grow any other pulse crops or anything else they choose to do. There is not that tyranny or oppression that one thinks of when we think of those things as if they must do it.

My colleague asked a fair question about how we should actually govern ourselves when we come together as communities and societies. It seems to me that it is about respecting the wishes of a group that decides on its own for itself. It is not about a decision being imposed by the government because it thinks that is the group deserves.

• (1255)

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour for me to rise in the House in order to defend principles. Today, I am pleased to defend democracy. My distinguished colleague from Churchill has moved a motion in the House to defend democracy and the right of farmers to determine their destiny.

The motion asks the government to do three things: consult, step back and accept. The government needs much more practice in order to excel at these activities. I hope it will start practising right now.

Business of Supply

The motion asks this government to consult those affected by this ill-intentioned bill: the farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board is managed by the farmers, for the farmers. They control and direct the Wheat Board. Is the government telling us and telling farmers that farmers do not know how to manage their own business? Not only does it believe that the farmer-run board is not doing its job but, furthermore, it does not trust the farmers' ability to decide whether or not their Wheat Board should be dismantled. If the government would allow farmers to decide in a plebiscite, such as the one organized by Ontario farmers, we would be prepared, on this side of the House, to accept that decision.

I know that I am the hundredth person to raise the next point, but it is an important one. Farmers have already voted to keep the Wheat Board: 62% of wheat producers and 51% of barley producers voted to keep it. Certainly, 51% is a close result. However, because this government does not stop repeating that it was given a strong mandate with less than 40% of the votes in Canada, I find that its argument lacks credibility.

I am suggesting to the House that the government does not want to consult farmers because it is afraid of their decision. Farmers have done their homework. They know that if the Canadian Wheat Board disappears, they will suffer the same fate as their Australian colleagues, who saw a dramatic drop of 70% per tonne in wheat prices. This is an ideological decision. It does not respect the farmers, contrary to what is implied by the misleading title of the bill introduced by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

This motion is not just about the Canadian Wheat Board. I was not joking when I said I was rising to defend democracy. In case the government has not noticed, people are currently demanding their right to speak. They want their voices to be heard. A stunt like this only fuels public cynicism about our respectable institutions. The government has to listen to reason and hear the voice of the people. It has to take a step back and accept the verdict handed down by the farmers.

This government has to stop showing contempt for the public. It has to stop looking down on those who do not share its views. Democracy is much more than just winning elections. Democracy is about holding ongoing discussions with the public. I do not mean it is about controlling the message, as the Prime Minister's Office does; it is about listening to the needs and opinions of the public.

Why is the government refusing to listen to the farmers? Why will the government not consult the farmers? Why does the government not follow Ontario's lead?

•(1300)

Yesterday I was listening to the speech by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst on Bill C-18. He spoke passionately about the situation with the fishers in his riding who struggle to earn a living from the fruits of their labour. What I gather is that sometimes there is a disparity between different producers in terms of the price they get for the same products. Has the government forgotten that the Canadian Wheat Board is responsible for marketing Canadian wheat?

The strength of the board is its ability to develop markets for our farmers. How do the Conservatives plan to replace the board in that

role? It is not an insignificant role when we know that 80% of western wheat is exported overseas. What is the government doing about the role the board currently plays in terms of transporting the goods? Can the government guarantee that western Canadian farmers will have the same access to the railway? Can it guarantee the same favourable prices? No, obviously not. The government is playing with the lives of thousands of farmers. The government is having fun while our hard-working farmers are assuming all the risk.

I am afraid this government has abandoned family farms and small-scale farms. It is not surprising. This government has chosen to side with the multinationals and big oil companies by granting them huge tax breaks, to the detriment of small and medium-sized businesses, taxpayers and consumers. Now it is choosing to side with large agri-businesses at the expense of Canadian farmers, without thinking about the impact this bill will have on their lives, their families and their communities.

The Canadian Wheat Board is the farmers' union, their way of getting better prices. In unity, there is strength. Group insurance exists, which allows people to pay lower premiums than they would individually. Employees' unions allow them to negotiate with their employers for better salaries. Whether my colleagues across the floor like it or not, farmers will be the ones who lose, and they know it. That is why they voted to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board.

I am proud to rise in this House and defend the position they have taken. I am proud to stand up to the Conservative steamroller and defend the democratic rights of all Canadians. I am proud to stand here, alongside my NDP colleagues, and oppose the government's destructive policies. I am proud to do so on behalf of the people of Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert and on behalf of those who are overlooked by this government. We will proudly stand up to the government and oppose every bad bill it brings before this House.

The government's plan to eliminate the Canadian Wheat Board without the farmers' consent is just one more example in a list that is already too long.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke a lot about democracy and about the rights and responsibilities of democrats. Does she not agree that a fundamental principle of democracy is that the majority cannot violate the rights of a minority? Does she not agree that individuals have the right to sell what belongs to them? Does she not agree that it is a violation of the spirit of democracy for the state to force farmers to sell their own products to the government, instead of selling them on the market and doing what they please?

It is strange that a member of Parliament from Quebec is talking about this, when Quebecers are able to sell their own products on the market and are not forced to sell them to the government. Does she not agree that it is not fair to put farmers in prison, as has happened to farmers in western Canada for committing the crime of selling their own products? Does she agree with imprisoning Canadian farmers?

Business of Supply

• (1305)

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague opposite for his comments. The Wheat Board was originally established and founded with the approval of farmers. I spoke about democracy today. I know what I am talking about. When we talk about democracy, we talk about choice. As a result, we defend the right of those involved to determine their own future. That is democracy. Here in the House, I am standing up for Ontario farmers. I am a member from Quebec, but I also fight for the interests of all Canadian farmers.

Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the economic health of the agriculture sector is very important in Canada. The Canadian Wheat Board levels the playing field. My colleague gave very concrete examples of price disparities, and in light of the dismantling being proposed by the Conservatives, this creates yet another division between small farms, family farms, and larger farms that are more prosperous.

I would be interested in hearing my colleague's thoughts on holding consultations with all types of farms on how small farms would be affected.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her question. I will be brief. We have repeatedly asked the government if a study has been done concerning the impact of eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board. Unfortunately, as always, the government is not answering our questions. We know that this will be disastrous for families and their communities.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): We have time for one quick question and a brief response.

The member for Vegreville—Wainwright.

[English]

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member across the way says that she knows what she is talking about, however she really does not. She indicated that the Wheat Board was put in place with the approval of farmers. That is not true. Originally, when it was a voluntary board it was, but under the War Measures Act, during the war, to get cheap grain for the war effort and not to give farmers a better price, the monopoly was put in place and it simply was not removed afterwards. So, farmers were given no choice on the issue of the monopoly.

All we want to do is return it to its original state, which was a voluntary organization where farmers could choose to participate or not. So the member should listen, get her history right, and I then think we would have a more beneficial debate in this place.

[Translation]

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member opposite for his question. I would like to say that it is true that the board was abolished after the first world war, but farmers fought back and filed a complaint and it was reinstated.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I just came from something that relates to what I want to talk about, and that is trade and having the freedom to change my businesses. Indeed, it is a pleasure for me to participate in this

debate. I am proud that our government introduced the marketing freedom for grain farmers act in the House last week. I am particularly pleased that we have the opportunity to correct those misleading assumptions and predictions some people have been making, that providing marketing choice for wheat and barley producers in western Canada would somehow alter our system of supply management in my home province of Ontario.

Our government supports marketing choice for western wheat and barley growers, and it is entirely a separate issue from that of supply management. Those who try to link the two, providing marketing choice for western grain producers and our government's commitment to support Canada's supply management, are simply making mischief, but more so, they just do not understand it. There is no link.

Producers in the five supply managed industries, dairy, chicken, turkey, eggs and also the broiler hatching eggs, worked long and hard to establish these systems. There was clear support, and that is the important part, in all cases for the implementation of a supply management system before the provincial government and the federal government established and brought it in.

Quite honestly, I remember well that I had not taken over and purchased the farm yet in 1965, when supply management came in. The then minister of agriculture for the Province of Ontario, and I might add, the best agriculture minister that the Ontario has ever had, William A. Stewart, brought in supply management. In 1970, I had the opportunity to start to purchase the family farm.

Supply management was one of the main reasons I understood and was able to continue on, going into the dairy industry. Also at the same time, it was an opportunity for me as a young individual just graduating from college, when I started to buy the farm, to start to purchase land and grow grains and oil seeds. I have had the opportunity of being in both systems, which actually give freedom for marketing in Ontario.

The vast majority, if not all, of the producers who now participate in the supply management system support it. On the other side, the Canadian Wheat Board has a regionally shared governance administration. If farmers grow wheat and barley in western Canada and actually want to sell it for export for food use, then they have to sell it through the Wheat Board. Or the other option is to go to jail.

I do not understand the people on the other side always wanting to give farmers the responsibility to grow the crops, spend the money on the input, make the decision to grow them, but then actually saying they do not have the ability to market it. Quite honestly, it is amazing. They do not mind sending farmers to jail for the long gun registry or for selling wheat, but they do not want to give them the opportunity for marketing.

Far from being universally supported, as is the case of supply management, a large number of these producers involved just want an option. Farmers want an alternative to the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly. We are going to continue to work to give them just that.

Farmers should be in the driver's seat when it comes to making their own business decisions. They make the investments and they build their business, all through hard work and knowledge. They take all the risks. Should they not also have the right to decide how and to whom they market their products? Absolutely, they should.

Whether people are barbers, plumbers, financial advisors, hardware store owners or car dealers, as Canadian business owners, they have the opportunity to make the decisions. They choose to make those decisions, as do the eastern farmers, like myself and my fellow farmers in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Ontario. Why would we not give the western farmers the opportunity to do the same?

•(1315)

The Government of Canada is working hard to give the wheat and barley producers the marketing freedom they deserve. Farmers want the ability to add value to their crops and capture more profits beyond the farm gate. They deserve to have the opportunity to get the best possible return for their product.

Farmers are already making business decisions for commodities such as canola, pulse crops, cattle and even vegetables and a number of other farm products. Farmers know how the open market works. It is amazing to me that we would burden the farmers with all the expense of putting a crop in but the opposition does not want to give them the opportunity, and do not think they have the knowledge, to market it. Quite honestly, that is an insult to the farmers of western Canada.

Our vision for the Canadian Wheat Board is as a strong, voluntary and viable wheat board that farmers can use if they so choose.

Let me talk a little about supply management because, quite honestly, that is what this is all about.

At the same time, the government continues to support supply management at home and on the international stage. The Conservative Party of Canada is the only party that actually talked about the support for and the need to stand behind supply management in the last election.

The third party, the Liberals, had been in power for 20 years. Oh sorry, maybe it was 13; it just seemed like an eternity. They always just talked about it, but actually never did anything about it. As the Minister of Agriculture said at the Dairy Farmers of Canada annual meeting in February, our record on supply management speaks for itself. I cannot say enough about the support that the farmers have for our Canadian agriculture minister as he deals with both supply management and the freedom of marketing across Canada and the vision and goals that he has in mind to keep this incredible industry strong and sustainable.

What have we done on supply management? We have actually acted under article 28 of the GATT agreement to limit the import of milk protein concentrates. We harmonized the compositional cheese standards to bring greater certainty to processors and also to consumers. Canadians know that cheese is made out of milk, and we

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have made sure that Canadian families know what kind of cheese they are getting when they go to the grocery store.

The government is working also to continue to make sure that the WTO special agriculture safeguards are available if they are needed in the future. Finally, the government is also continuing to defend the interests that are important to supply managed industries in the international trade negotiations.

Clearly, supply management is an issue of paramount importance to all Canadians. Why? It is because supply management creates jobs and prosperity for Canadians. It creates prosperity in our urban areas and for thousands of well-kept dairy and poultry farms from coast to coast, from British Columbia to Newfoundland. Supply management provides livelihoods, not only for tens of thousands of Canadian farmers and their farm families, but also for their suppliers, transporters, and everyone right up the value chain from the gate to the plate. It is an economic engine not only in rural Canada but clearly in urban Canada also.

Why would anyone want to tamper with the supply management when it has been so successful and brought so many benefits to consumers, producers and others in the industry right across the value chain? It makes absolutely no sense, and that is our point.

I would suggest that because there has never been any action on the other side of the floor, and in fact during the election they never saw the need or the importance of supply management, that actually they are the ones who are continually pushing to maybe do something about supply management in terms of its dissolution.

•(1320)

The Conservative Party of Canada, the members on this side, are the only ones who not only say we support it, but we will put boots to the ground and put action in place when we are asked and see the need to do so.

On the other hand, grain growers have told us for years that they want the opportunity to make their own business decisions. It is not the case with supply management, where producers have strongly supported their marketing systems and have thanked the government for firmly supporting them.

A long-standing and continuing support for supply management and our commitment to increased options for western grain producers reflects this government's commitment to giving farmers what they need to run their businesses effectively.

We recognize that providing marketing freedom is a major change in agriculture in western Canada. That is why we have consulted extensively. We have gone across the country to talk about the supply chain, from farm to seaport.

Business of Supply

Over the summer, a working group comprising experts in the field has done just that, finding out how we market the grain and about the transportation systems and how we can transition the current CWB-run system to an open market that includes the voluntary marketing pools. The working group is one of many ways the government is seeking advice on how we move forward.

The marketing freedom for grain farmers act is part of our commitment to move forward with the programs and processes that are most beneficial to farmers, not just to them but to the entire industry.

We came to office with a set of principles and issues that we promised Canadians we would tackle. We have remained focused and determined to accomplish the things we were told were important to them. One of the issues was providing marketing freedom for western barley and wheat producers. That is why we introduced the Marketing Freedom for Grain Farmers act.

The Canadian Wheat Board and some members across the way have fought change because they want the status quo. Apparently in their view, farmers just do not know how or do not have the ability to market their grain.

As was mentioned earlier, farmers take all the risks: when to plant, when to harvest, what to put on it, how to grow it, when to market it when they produce it. That is unless they grow barley and wheat in western Canada. It does not make sense.

Where does the idea come from? Oddly enough, it does not come from history. Let us go back a little bit. The Canadian Wheat Board was established in 1935. That is 76 years ago. It was originally established as a voluntary marketing agency for prairie wheat, but the sale of wheat through the board became compulsory in 1943.

In 1949, the Canadian Wheat Board's powers were extended to include prairie oats and barley. From 1949 to 1975, about 25 years, the board was the single desk for western oats, barley and wheat, whether it was for human consumption or for animal consumption. But with changes to the feed grain policy in 1974 and 1976, exclusive marketing rights over prairie grain fed to animals in Canada were removed by the board. Interestingly, the sky did not fall. These changes took effect and in fact the use of grain cereals for livestock has grown significantly since then.

Next, oats were removed from the board's jurisdiction in 1989. Again, it is amazing that the sky did not fall, but what actually happened was that a thriving oats processing sector has since developed in western Canada.

What started out as a monopoly has been evolving over 37 years, until what we are left with is a single desk for barley and wheat for export and domestic human consumption, those two only.

Farmers quickly adapted to the changes that were made, and the Canadian Wheat Board was not missed. What made sense during World War II just does not make sense in the 21st century.

•(1325)

Wheat and barley growers recognize, and so does this government, that the Canadian brewery industries have lost confidence in the ability of the Canadian Wheat Board to reliably supply the malt

and barley they need to be competitive in the dynamic international malt and beer markets. Therefore, moving into the 21st century involves looking at the Wheat Board in a totally different way. It means putting on a new set of lenses and looking at what is going to be good not only for farmers but for the industry.

We recognize that this is a major change for agriculture in western Canada. That is why we have been consulting extensively with stakeholders from across the supply chain, from the farm to the seaport. Over the summer, a working group comprised of experts in the field heard a broad range of advice on how the grain marketing and transportation systems could transition from the current Wheat Board-run system to an open market that includes voluntary marketing pools.

I want to be very clear about this. This is not about the abolition of the Canadian Wheat Board. It is about giving farmers the choice of free marketing on their own or using the Canadian Wheat Board, something that opposition parties do not want to seem to comprehend would actually give them choice. They just talk about getting rid of the Wheat Board. The working group is one of many ways that the government is seeking advice on how to move forward.

The government is intent on making tangible progress in reducing the long-standing interference in farmers' business on the Prairies by the Canadian Wheat Board, which has taken the reins away from individual grain farmers when it comes to their very own businesses.

We need the monopoly Canadian Wheat Board, quite honestly, as a monopoly so that it can get out of the way and let farmers conduct their business. We know there are a number of farmers who will want to use it, as they do in Ontario because the wheat board still exists under the Grain Farmers of Ontario, for example. That is why members of the House need to support giving marketing freedom to grain farmers.

By the way, this has nothing to do with supply management, but our government has the same passion for the protection of supply management as we do for the support of the marketing freedom for grain farmers.

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully and I am beginning to believe that some of the members opposite have missed the point of the motion. The point of the motion is not that the Wheat Board be preserved, it is not that farmers not have a choice but that there be a vote. The point of the motion is that the farmers affected by this decision by the government be given the opportunity, as is so clear in the legislation, to cast a ballot and exercise their democratic right to decide for themselves if they want to abandon the Wheat Board or not. That seems to be what is being missed.

My question for the member opposite is, what is it that the government is so afraid of that it refuses to allow a vote?

Business of Supply

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that last spring 76% of young farmers said they wanted a choice. It is sort of interesting that when the Wheat Board provided the opportunity for a vote, it forgot to ask whether farmers wanted the option of choice, yes or no. To me, quite honestly, it did not ask the farmers whether or not they actually wanted the choice.

I was on the agriculture committee in the last session. When the committee toured the country, one of the topics discussed was the future of farming and young farmers. It got to the point of farmers asking the government to give young farmers the opportunity to get the talent, technology, training and education older farmers got, and not lock them in to only controlling their expenses but also to sell their products.

• (1330)

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a great deal of respect for the member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, but I have to admit I am a little surprised by his revisionist history. On the agriculture committee on which I sit, all members of the opposition in the past session, whether it be Liberal, NDP or Bloc, wanted assurances from the Conservative government that while supply management was on the agenda during the CETA discussions, the comprehensive economic trade agreement with the European Union, we continually sought assurances that supply management was not on the negotiating table. We never received those assurances, not once.

This feigned new alliance with supply management is of some concern to all of us on this side of the House and all of those engaged in supply management. Why suddenly this rebirth, this feigned alliance with supply management?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, the member comes from Guelph which has the agriculture university and I do appreciate his thoroughness on the agriculture committee. He gets a little confused from time to time, but he is honest in his approach.

We have never changed our position on supply management. I wish the member's party and the other ones would have talked about it during the election. They chose not to because I do not think it is relevant to them. Not only have we talked about it, we have put our boots on the ground and when supply management comes to us with the issues that need to be dealt with, our Minister of Agriculture and this party stand behind it. We will go to the wall to support supply management.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's support. I represent hundreds, if not thousands, of family farms. I hear, especially from younger farmers, on a daily basis their desire to use the expertise, to use their business sense to develop markets for the grains that are currently held under the Canadian Wheat Board jurisdiction. They want to market those crops the same way that they are able to market other crops, the crops that are getting maximum value, the world price.

I think I know the hon. member's answer to this, but I have asked the opposition parties and they have never been able to give me a straight answer. I want to know if the hon. member who comes from Ontario believes that western young farmers are as educated, smart and as astute businessmen as the people in Ontario. The folks in Ontario have the freedom and are doing an excellent job being able

to market their wheat and barley. I wonder if he believes the same success can be transferred to young farmers in western Canada as well.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Peace River for all the work he does for his agricultural community and others. Since 2003, we have had the freedom of choice in providing sales for our grains. Absolutely.

When we met with the young farmers across Canada, they were educated. It is an insult to western farmers to tell them we want them to spend all their money on the input and make tough decisions, but when it comes to marketing, we do not think they have the talent or ability, so we are going to direct it to the Wheat Board which will market it for them. That is an insult and I hope young western farmers will soon have the same opportunity that we do in Ontario.

• (1335)

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is an insult is that western farmers had a plebiscite whose results were released on September 12 where 51% of barley growers and 60% of wheat growers wanted to maintain the single desk.

The Minister of Agriculture, in response, said that the direct vote was flawed. I would like to define plebiscite for the members across. It is the direct vote of all members of an electorate. In this case the electorate would be rural western farmers.

Why does the member not protect the integrity of his government by allowing a direct vote of western Canadian farmers on a clear question on whether they want to maintain the monopoly of the Wheat Board. Why muddy the results of our election that we had in May and insult western farmers by implying that they saw the May election as a CWB plebiscite?

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, it is interesting. When the Wheat Board did the plebiscite, it is my understanding that many of the young farmers who actually do the farming did not get a ballot. We can show where ballots were actually sent out to people who had passed away. We know that because of the way it was handled. The turnout was very dismal and about 33% wanted to get rid of the single desk.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague mentioned car dealers in his speech as examples of businesspeople who get to make their own decisions. However, I am sure he realizes that car dealerships are very carefully controlled. There can only be one Ford dealership in a certain area. It is designed that way in order to minimize competition so that there are not two Ford dealerships competing with each other, driving down their business margins.

Business of Supply

My question for my hon. colleague is, does he realize that the idea of the Wheat Board is so that small farmers get together and agree not compete with each other, to their mutual benefit? That is the benefit of the Wheat Board. It looks like there is no benefit in an up market. However, in a down market, believe me, it is good to band together.

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to comprehend whether that actually means something. I just bought a car. I think it was a truck. And guess what? I could go to any dealer. I had that option. Why? Because they sell on the open market. I have a choice whether I want to buy a car or buy a truck of the 15 or 20 different models which are out there.

I am sorry. I just do not understand the relevance of that kind of question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Windsor West.

The Canadian Wheat Board was created in the spirit of solidarity and to protect its members. It has existed for over 70 years and still has the unwavering support of its member farmers.

In a referendum conducted by the board, a majority of the 40,000 farmers who participated voted to maintain the single desk system, which has an effective monopoly on sales and prevents competition among farmers. In other words, the board unites western Canadian farmers, while the government's bill will only destroy these connections and divide the prairie farming community. This is just one more clear example of the regressive attitude that taints all of the policies put forward by this government.

The united front created by the board, which operates without public funding, gives prairie farmers peace of mind and financial stability that would be impossible without this institution.

Our farmers, who work tirelessly to provide Canadians with high-quality products, should not have to experience the additional financial stress that the Conservative government wants to impose on them. The Wheat Board protects farmers from the vagaries of the market, ensures that all of them receive a fair and equitable income regardless of their production volume, and prevents money from ending up in the pockets of the middlemen who seek to profit from our farmers' hard work. Chances are slim that the price of wheat will drop on the international market. However, if the Wheat Board is dismantled, farmers' income will certainly be significantly lower.

In economic circumstances such as those we are experiencing today, we cannot afford to weaken our economy's small financial stakeholders. In Manitoba alone, over 3,000 jobs are at risk. The province will be deprived of over \$140 million in revenue. Is this a good strategy for boosting our economy or is it a way to line the pockets of large American corporations that are just waiting for the green light from their Conservative friends to invade the Canadian grain market?

The motion of the member for Churchill—the motion currently before the House—would ensure that farmers are able to exercise their democratic right to express their views on the future of their institutions. Democracy is a right that all countries have a responsibility to protect. Why is the Conservative government

trying to threaten the democratic rights of our farmers? Do the Conservatives feel threatened by such a democratic process?

A number of studies have shown that a single desk model, like the Wheat Board, makes it possible to bring in hundreds of millions of dollars more per year than on the open market. Why then does the Conservative government want to deprive Canadian families of this income? Why do the Conservatives want to deprive farmers and their families of revenue that allows them to actively participate in the economy and be involved in their communities?

The Canadian Wheat Board is the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world. Why does the Conservative government want to dismantle this jewel of the Canadian farming community, which allows Canada to shine at the world level? This tactic is clearly part of the Conservative government's strategy to strip Canada of all its international credibility.

Not only do farmers rely on the board to ensure fair access for all, but they do not all have a local market to provide them access to the 70 countries worldwide that are buying our wheat. The board is also synonymous with quality for these 70 purchasing countries because our institution sets quality standards and speaks out against the unlimited use of GMOs. Clearly, our farmers are proud of the high-quality products they provide to consumers, and with a system like the Wheat Board, they benefit fully. They reap their grain and the rewards from their hard work.

All Canadians across the country should feel threatened by the government's bill. Some 80% of the wheat sold in Canada comes from this single desk, or the Prairies in Canada's west. The quality of the products on our shelves is being threatened. If the government goes ahead with its plans and ignores the voice of the majority, then pride in our products and the quality of those products will suffer.

● (1340)

Farming is the foundation of Canadian society, our larder, as they like to say. Canada needs a healthy farming industry in order for all of Canadian society to prosper. Contrary to what the Conservatives are saying, this issue affects more than the Prairies. Ending the Canadian Wheat Board's monopoly and dismantling the board jeopardizes the entire Canadian farming industry and threatens the survival of family farms, which are so dear to communities such as Kamloops, British Columbia, Stanstead in my riding, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, and Sainte-Marie-de-Kent, New Brunswick; it is an insult to one of the founding professions of our society, our great country of Canada.

Business of Supply

I did not think I needed to remind the Conservatives that democracy is also a founding principle of our society. The motion moved by the hon. member for Churchill seeks to preserve the democratic rights of farmers to allow them to decide for themselves on the future of the board that they have been running and financing themselves for decades. The Conservatives would do well to vote in favour of farmers and democracy by supporting a motion that stands up for our agricultural workers.

Since the Conservatives champion non-interference in the free market and refuse to intervene in the actual creation of stable jobs, how does they justify their interference where it was not asked for and where it is not warranted? The Canadian Wheat Board is managed and funded by farmers. The government and taxpayers do not fund the activities of this institution. With this bill, the Conservatives are not defending the interests of our farmers in any way. Once again, the Conservatives are completely out of touch with the reality of Canadians and are taking action that is contrary to the will and values of the Canadian public.

The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food invokes marketing freedom to justify his bill. The Canadian wheat market is currently not controlled by the big American corporations, which are close to the Conservatives. Currently, farmers are free of the financial stress that would be created by dismantling the Wheat Board. The Prairie grain market is free of the Conservatives' regressive attitude. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food should allow farmers to express their opinions freely and should set aside this bill.

The Conservatives keep repeating that they were given the mandate to dismantle the Wheat Board in the last election. However, they refuse to prove this support by holding a plebiscite of the farmers who are members of the Wheat Board in order to allow them to have their say and give the government a clear and precise mandate. If the Conservatives are so convinced of the farmers' support for their bill, they will not hesitate to support the motion of the member for Churchill, who merely wishes to ensure that our farmers have the democratic right to have a say in the future of their management tools.

Along with my colleague from the riding of Churchill, I firmly believe that the government must organize a proper free vote for all current members of the Canadian Wheat Board, so they may again express their will to the government, with the hope that this time the Prime Minister and the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food will listen to what farmers want to tell them.

• (1345)

[English]

Mr. Ed Komarnicki (Souris—Moose Mountain, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the member talk about democracy being a fundamental right and that the voices of the farmers who voted in the plebiscite should not be ignored. There were issues about who could vote and who could not. However, at least 50% of barley producers want the freedom to market outside the Wheat Board. A good number of wheat producers want to do the same. Why is the member and his party ignoring those farmers who want to market outside the Wheat Board?

The member and his party say that they have nothing against people pooling their resources together and selling through the Canadian Wheat Board. However, they also say that the government should not compel those who want to sell somewhere else to sell through the Canadian Wheat Board. What does my colleague have to say about those farmers? Why is he and his party not listening to those farmers, a good percentage of whom grow their own crops and want to deal with them as they wish? They also make huge investments into their farming operations. If the existing legislation is not changed they would be fined and put in jail. In a democratic country like Canada, how can the member justify putting farmers in jail for selling their own crops at the best price they can get for them?

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board has played an important role over the past 70 years, and it will continue to do so if the government is willing to pass the motion moved by the hon. member for Churchill. This motion calls for a free vote that would include everyone who is affected by this process.

This board works, is effective and gives everyone a fair price within an open market. We are simply saying that farmers should be given the opportunity to have a say on this issue.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it takes a great deal of courage for a member of the Conservative Party to stand up and ask why that party is not listening to farmers. There are prairie grain wheat farmers who have voted in a plebiscite to say that they want to retain the Canadian Wheat Board and yet the government wants to get rid of it. I ask the member who posed the question, why are he and his government not listening to farmers?

Although evidence is important, it is not something the government gives an ounce of credibility to. There was an interesting report entitled, "Performance Evaluation of the Canadian Wheat Board" which came out in 1996. The authors were three professors from three major universities, the University of Manitoba, the University of Saskatchewan and the University of Alberta.

The report states:

The single-desk selling system in Canada is viewed as something that facilitates transactions and is regarded by Brazilian buyers as a key to the confidence and reliability of purchasing wheat from Canada.

There are so many wonderful reasons to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. It brings so much value to our prairie farmers. Would the member not agree that is the case?

• (1350)

[Translation]

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I completely agree.

There is strength in numbers. It is disappointing to hear the government say that opening the market will help farmers across the country. We need to join forces and give farmers the chance to have a clear say.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Compton-Stanstead for his spirited and interesting speech.

The Conservatives are planning to abolish the Canadian Wheat Board. They also want to abolish the gun registry and creators' rights regarding private copying. In fact, they want to abolish anything that people use to protect themselves, if it resembles a collective in any way.

Will the Conservatives go down in history as the abolitionists of social democracy?

Mr. Jean Rousseau: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for this wonderful question.

Uniting people for a common cause has always been a strength in our communities and in Canadian society. We become bigger and stronger when we work together. We can have a bigger impact on everyone's future. Solidarity is always far better than division.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the member for Windsor West to resume debate, I should let him know that I will have to interrupt his remarks at the top of the hour for statements by members.

The hon. member for Windsor West.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the motion from the member for Churchill discussing a central principle of democracy, which is people having their rights, especially having their rights respected. It is bound from a tradition of legislation that has been duped by the government and usurped by the people who have the vehicle of the Canadian Wheat Board as part of their conditions of doing business and their investments, not only in terms of their businesses but their families.

It is important to note that Canada's current challenges stem from a lot of different issues related to our massive geography, our disperse population and a very diverse group of individuals and people across this country with different interests. In the 1920s, the farming community felt enough need to band together to create a collective to be able to compete in the open markets with the wheat product they were providing. It is important because there was motivation at that time to do so, which came about from their personal experiences and their understanding that if they could come together as a collective, at times it would be to their advantage.

We do that even to this day in many respects, and we have in this country in many other fora. The credit unions are an example. When it became impossible for the farming community or others to get access to credit that was reasonable and fair, people got together. Still to this day, in cities we have collectives of financing, accounting and services in the banking industry because the profits then go back to the people. They understand that together they do much better than they do alone.

We also do this when we form cities, municipalities and towns. Instead of having independent police or fire departments, everybody understands that if we work as a collective and pay a fee for this, then we will get that service and that insurance. This is about respecting a tradition that was set up in the 1920s.

In 1943, they went to the single-desk marketing. The legislation that was created for the Canadian Wheat Board calls for it to have vote if it wants to dissolve or change the concept that it has now. To be clear, this board does not bring in a profit for itself. It has democratically elected its members, ten of whom come from the farming community and four of whom are appointed by the government, and it chooses a chair. That is critically important because in the legislation from the government, it would not allow the democratically elected farmers to remain on the Canadian Wheat Board. It would appoint its own people to dismantle it and it would not allow the elected farmers to make those difficult choices, even if they did not want to and are forced to have this legislation.

The member for Churchill should be commended for this motion because it goes to an important piece, not only behind the Wheat Board, but understanding that legislation that was a protectiveness chamber, that was here and there are expectations toward it, would be dismantled. That could set a pattern for other legislation. The government is saying that it says that but that it will disregard that altogether.

The member also needs to be commended because there has been a plebiscite with 63% of farmers saying that they would like to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. The farmers have had their vote and they were very clear on that mandate. The Conservatives often talk about having a clear mandate from the Canadian people when they only had 38% of the vote. That is unacceptable. Their 38%, which we hear daily in the House of Commons at question period, ad nauseam, seems to make some type of a mandate for an absolute majority of everything from legislation to discourse that happens not only in this chamber but also in our committees. However, the reality is that Canadian farmers were far louder when they said that they did not want to dismantle the Wheat Board.

When we look at some of the economics of this, with an economy that is fragile right now, world markets in a turmoil and a great deal of uncertainty coming up, why would the government actually do this without an action plan? There has been no study or analysis. We do that as a regular business. Cities and towns do that before making multi-million dollar contracts, awards and services. However, meanwhile, we would have billions of dollars tied up in the future and we are not even seeing an economic analysis presented before us, which is unfortunate because it shows the reckless abandon of ideology that the Conservatives have and the reckless nature of their intent to ram this through as fast as they can. I believe they want to do so because of electoral timing. They want to tear down the Wheat Board and bring in the different changes that will take place before the next election.

• (1355)

Once again, farmers have been out there saying that they would prefer to keep this as the particular option right now. There could be a further debate among farmers about what they want to do. I know in Ontario they had that debate and they had that choice. However, they had that debate first, which was much more effective than what is taking place here.

All the member for Churchill is doing is defending the rights of those individuals who have the system in place that they have invested in. They have invested their families, their money and their lifelong interest into their farms and to have that thrown to the wind without an economic analysis and without the due diligence necessary is completely unacceptable.

It is important to go back to the 63% of people who responded. There has been a debate about the type of plebiscite that took place and the different types of problems that they faced. We should go to the suggestion by the member for Churchill to have that educated, earnest attempt to let farmers understand the consequences of what is going to take place, to know them and to face them in a very strategic way. However, we need to do so in a responsible way before we undermine ourselves, our country and our farmers, especially when they have the right to make the destiny for themselves, not have it imposed on them by others.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The member for Windsor West will have three minutes remaining for his speech and five minutes for questions and comments when the House resumes debate on the motion.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*English*]

DIWALI

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow is a special day for Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and Buddhists. Tomorrow marks the holy day of Diwali, the Festival of Lights. It is a joyous celebration of good over evil, light over darkness.

The foundation and meanings of Diwali can be shared by Canadians of all faith. This holy day is often observed with the lighting of an oil lamp, the setting off fireworks and the generous giving of gifts and sweets. These traditions bring families, friends and loved ones closer together under the values of peace and friendship. Diwali is a time that reminds us all about the incredible contribution toward this great country by Indo Canadians.

I would like to take this opportunity, on behalf of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale, to extend my most sincere best wishes for a happy, healthy and joyous Diwali to all those celebrating around the world.

* * *

[*Translation*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week there was an article in a weekly paper in my riding about the status of women in Fermont. The article confirmed what everyone already knows: violence; verbal, physical and sexual abuse; geographic isolation and distress are commonplace for women in Fermont.

During a recent visit to my riding, I witnessed the extent of the social tragedy currently playing out in Fermont when I met with staff

Statements by Members

at the shelter that provides assistance to women. This centre has seen a 300% increase in demand for its services over the past year. The cost of living in the region has also increased.

These women have had enough. I am calling on the Minister for Status of Women to come up with a contingency plan and concrete assistance measures for isolated regions experiencing an economic boom, in order to fund projects that provide a safe place and housing for women. The women of Fermont also have a right to health as well as physical and economic safety.

* * *

[*English*]

NORMAN LALONDE

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some very sad news to tell this House. Cornwall's own "Mr. Canada" has died. Norm Lalonde, who single-handedly began Canada Day festivities in Cornwall, has, unfortunately, passed away.

In the early 1970s, Norm took it upon himself to celebrate Canada's birthday. He gathered together about 200 residents, cooked some hot dogs, let off some fireworks and led everyone in the singing of Canada's national anthem.

From that very humble beginning, Norm grew this event into one of the largest celebrations in eastern Ontario. Today, crowds of 25,000 to 30,000 proud Canadians regularly turn up at Lamoureux Park on July 1 every year to celebrate Canada's birthday.

We owe all this to "Mr. Canada", as Norm was affectionately known in Cornwall.

Our condolences go out to his wife and greatest supporter, Thérèse, and his children, David, Patricia, Stephen and Norm Jr.

God bless Mr. Canada.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RICK HANSEN

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the kick-off of the 25th Anniversary Relay in honour of the Rick Hansen Man in Motion World Tour. Some 7,000 participants will retrace the Canadian portion of the grueling journey completed 25 years ago by an extraordinary man who wanted to make the world a better place, inspire Canadians and help people with spinal cord injuries.

[*English*]

This relay will remind us all of the importance of investing in research for effective cures to help improve the lives of thousands upon thousands of Canadians.

Statements by Members

Rick Hansen has been an exemplary role model for our society, having inspired so very many of us to surpass ourselves over the past quarter century. It is with profound admiration and gratitude that we recognize today the depth of his contribution to Canada and to medical research around the world. With that in mind, this year, relay participants will proudly carry the Rick Hansen Medal as it makes its way across the country.

I wish everyone involved with the Rick Hansen 25th anniversary relay tremendous success.

CAPITAL EXPERIENCE

Mr. Barry Devolin (Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a special group of students in Ottawa today participating in a program I call a “Capital Experience” where student leaders from each of the seven high schools in my riding come to Ottawa for three days each year to learn about career opportunities in public life.

They have visited Parliament, the South Korean Embassy, Amnesty International, the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Press Gallery, the University of Ottawa and Summa Strategies.

I wish to thank those who shared their time with these students and thank the businesses and services clubs that sponsored them.

Today, I welcome to Parliament: Katelyn Lloyd and Iain Sullivan from Brock; Chad Leroux and Matthew Steele from Crestwood; Meredith March and Amber Wilson from Fenelon Falls; Samantha Bixi and Puru Shah from Haliburton; Samantha Thompson, Alec Becking and Dan Lowe from I.E. Weldon; Megan Connell and Mandi Manderson from L.C.V.I.; Courtney Kavanagh, Keira Mann and Robert Ridenaur from St. Thomas Aquinas; and Kali Tucker from Apsley.

I ask my colleagues to join me in wishing these young people all the best as they make decisions regarding their future careers.

● (1405)

[Translation]

JEAN-MARC AUBIN

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, Jean-Marc Aubin has been an ardent defender of education rights for francophones and has dedicated himself to developing French-language services.

Mr. Aubin was a founding member of Collège Boréal and president of the Association canadienne-française de l'Ontario. In the 1990s, he was president of the French language section and, under his leadership, that section carved out its own unique place in the region and in the province. Mr. Aubin is currently the chair of the Conseil scolaire public du Grand Nord de l'Ontario. He is always ready to bring forward innovative projects to benefit students and the francophone community.

In November 2010, he was awarded the Jean-Robert Gauthier prize for his outstanding contribution. In May 2011, he was

decorated with the Ordre de la Pléiade, an honour bestowed by the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie.

Mr. Aubin continues to focus on and promote the rights of Franco-Ontarians. I am pleased and very proud to rise today to congratulate Jean-Marc Aubin.

[English]

DIWALI

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, October 26, 2011, marks the celebration of Diwali, the Festival of Lights, and Bandi Chhor Divas around the world. A holiday in India, Diwali symbolizes the victory of good over evil.

I would personally like to wish happy Diwali not only to people in India or people of Indian descent but to all Canadians. Canadians of Indian origin would like to thank their parliamentarians for sharing in the celebration of Diwali on Parliament Hill for many years.

This year as we celebrate 2011 as the Year of India in Canada, there is an opportunity to learn more about the richness of Indian culture. As Canada and India continue to forge closer ties economically, we also see the contribution the vibrant Indo-Canadian community has made to the fabric of Canada.

On behalf of the constituents of Calgary Northeast and my family, I wish all of my colleagues a very happy Diwali and Bandi Chhor Divas.

HUNTING SEASON

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, fall is a special time of the year in Renfrew County. It is a time of traditional heritage activities as the days get shorter and the nights grow longer.

Farmers are finishing up with the fall harvest, loggers are preparing to go into the bush for the winter cut. It is a time for church suppers and getting caught up with neighbours at craft fairs and bazaars as we ready for winter and, best of all, it is hunting season in the Ottawa valley.

For the first time in over 15 years, law-abiding sportsmen, thanks to our Conservative government, can look forward to doing what they have always done without the heavy, oppressive hand of big government on their shoulders.

There is a new attitude in Ottawa. It is one that respects the rights of individuals to enjoy lawful activities without passing judgment and constantly telling people what they can and cannot do.

In the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke we value our freedom and when it is fall, it is hunting season in the Ottawa valley.

[Translation]

COMMUNITY CARE AND HOME CARE

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in the House to acknowledge the exemplary work of Aide à la communauté et services à domicile, a community care and home care agency based in my riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent that serves the entire greater Quebec City area.

This year marks the 25th anniversary of this non-profit organization, which in that time has served almost 15,000 people in need by providing them with almost one million hours of care. It has created almost 1,500 jobs, not to mention all the young people it has reintegrated into the workforce. Today I am proud to recognize their contribution to our society.

Community groups play an essential role. To the extraordinary people who are the backbone of our society, people like Linda Couture, the founder and managing director of this care agency, and her entire team of dedicated employees and volunteers, we wish a happy 25th anniversary.

* * *

[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw the attention of the House to 20 Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada staff and volunteers who are in Ottawa today to raise awareness on the importance of continued MS research in Canada.

MS affects thousands of Canadians and is a disease for which there is presently no cure. This disease knows no bounds. It affects young and old, male and female alike. It not only affects people living with the disease but also their families and caregivers, health care professionals, researchers and people who fight against MS.

Our government is investing in research such as funding and developing an MS monitoring system, providing new tax support for caregivers, and working closely with provincial and territorial governments, medical associations and the MS Society of Canada.

Close collaboration will help ensure that people living with MS and their caregivers get the support and advice they need to ensure they have the opportunity to participate fully in all aspects of life.

I encourage all members of the House to support programs that more directly meet the needs of the people affected by MS today and advance research to help us find a cure for tomorrow.

* * *

• (1410)

DIWALI

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Diwali is an opportunity for all of us to reflect on the past year, to look forward and plan for the future with renewed optimism. Many people in my riding of Newton—North Delta, including myself, will gather with family and friends to give thanks, to celebrate and to contemplate.

Statements by Members

Diwali, the Festival of Lights, celebrates the light within each of us as we welcome the coming new year. It is a time where hearts are filled with joy and minds look forward to the bright new future.

Every Canadian can share in hope for the future. We pride ourselves on our openness and we strive to build an inclusive society.

We are not there yet. We must draw on the good within each of us, to open our hearts and minds, and increase our understanding of one another. At this time, let us all recommit to this goal.

On behalf of my NDP colleagues, *Diwali aur naya saal mubarak*. Best wishes for Diwali and a happy new year. I wish everyone celebrating this special occasion right around the globe the very best.

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WORLD FOOD PROGRAM

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the number of people suffering from chronic hunger and malnutrition grows due to crises resulting from conflicts, natural disasters and poverty, it is even more important than ever to help those in need.

Today, we welcome to Canada Josette Sheeran, executive director of the United Nations World Food Program, and I am proud that Canada is the second biggest donor to the World Food Program.

[Translation]

For more than a half-century, the World Food Program has been on the front lines of major food crises around the world, providing food to those who need it most. Today, the WFP is playing a crucial role in East Africa, using all means available to deliver food to the more than 13 million people affected by drought.

Canada and the WFP are working together to put an end to famine among the most vulnerable populations.

* * *

[English]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Multiple Sclerosis Society volunteers and staff from across the country, including from my own constituency of Vancouver Centre, are on the Hill today.

[Translation]

As a doctor, I know about the often devastating effects that multiple sclerosis can have on patients as well as their entire family and their caregivers. Multiple sclerosis is a debilitating, lifelong disease that affects approximately 75,000 Canadians. Three new cases will be diagnosed today.

Oral Questions

[*English*]

That is why the Liberal Party of Canada calls for urgent clinical trials on CCSVI to ensure that MS patients have the best possible evidence-based care.

The issue of caregivers is also an important one for MS patients. It is imperative that this House works toward giving them the financial support and resources they need to be cared for at home as long as possible.

I ask the House to applaud all of the volunteers on the Hill today. They deserve it.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP interim leader thinks anyone who has a tax free savings account is wealthy, but 6.7 million Canadians have tax free savings accounts. That is a lot of NDP taxation targets.

The NDP thinks anyone who plans for their future and saves their own money is wealthy. It not only wants to hike income, sales and business taxes, now it has set its sights on Canadians' hard-earned tax free savings.

Our Conservative government brought in tax free savings accounts to provide greater incentives for Canadians, especially low and modest income individuals, to save. Our government deliberately set up the TFSAs to ensure that income in, and withdrawals from them, would not affect eligibility for federal income-tested benefits and credits.

While the NDP embarks on its latest tax grabbing scheme, our government will continue to occupy the side of Canadian taxpayers.

By attacking Canadians' savings, the NDP members have proven yet again that they are simply not fit to—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

* * *

• (1415)

FIREFIGHTERS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today marks the annual firefighters legislative outreach, where firefighters from across Canada come to Parliament to raise critical issues for public safety. For 14 years they have asked for the creation of a public safety officer compensation fund.

In 2005 the NDP brought forth this issue as a private member's motion. New Democrats and Conservatives voted 161 to 112 to establish the fund. Yet, six years later it has yet to be put in place.

We can think of no better time than this year's firefighters lobby for the government to announce that it will finally do what Parliament mandated six years ago.

Every year an average of 10 firefighters die in the line of duty to protect the public and save lives. They pay the ultimate price. Their families make a tremendous sacrifice and far too often suffer enormous financial hardship.

Today we rise in the House to pay tribute to the firefighters of Canada for their selflessness and sacrifice.

Today we renew our pledge to work to establish a public safety officer compensation fund for our nation's firefighters and police officers. Their courage is exemplary. They deserve no less.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is a huge day in our government's commitment to eliminate the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

I personally would like to thank the Prime Minister and our caucus for their support over the years as we exposed what a sham this registry is. For me, this is like payday after almost 18 years of exposing the registry as having nothing to do with effective gun control measures.

Canadians have recognized that the long gun registry is a waste of taxpayers' money. They replaced the member for Ajax—Pickering with a strong Conservative voice. They replaced the member for Yukon with a strong Conservative voice. They replaced the member for Nipissing—Timiskaming with a strong Conservative voice.

Those defeated MPs listened to their Ottawa bosses rather than their constituents. In fact, this issue was important in giving Canada a strong, stable, majority Conservative government.

Finally, long gun owners in Canada will no longer be unfairly targeted by a wasteful, paper-pushing exercise.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

G8 SUMMIT

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, more ministers were involved in the G8 gazebo fiasco. The Minister of the Environment also has a friend in the area. Here is what the Huntsville mayor's hand-picked operator got from the environment minister: "He told me he will whole-heartedly support the Huntsville IMC at cabinet and wanted to make sure we pass along our pitch...ASAP".

Can the Prime Minister explain the environment minister's involvement in the G8 slush fund?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts on this are well-known. They have been completely reviewed by the Auditor General. The former minister of transport, who is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, made the decisions. There have been recommendations made by the Auditor General on how we can improve the process in the future and we will do so.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, little by little, the truth is coming out. These new documents show that the Conservative ministers were given the authority to directly approve infrastructure projects submitted by members of Parliament.

We know that the President of the Treasury Board is heavily implicated. The Minister of Foreign Affairs is also involved, as is the Minister of Finance and now the Minister of the Environment. Something stinks and it is spreading throughout the cabinet.

When will a parliamentary investigation be conducted to shed some light on the minister's re-election fund?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts on this are well known. They were reviewed by the Auditor General. She made recommendations and we have indicated that we intend to follow those recommendations to improve the process in the future.

• (1420)

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the documents from the town of Huntsville show that the purse strings were opened because of the privileged relationship the Conservatives' friends have with Conservative ministers. The documents show that the G8 funds were mainly approved by the Minister of Finance.

Knowing how much control the Prime Minister and his office exert, we have to wonder: when will the Prime Minister take responsibility for the G8 funding scandal?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, the Auditor General reviewed all the relevant documentation. The government agreed to follow her recommendations to improve the process. We approved 32 projects, and all the funds have been transferred. They were good projects but we intend to review the recommendations and improve the process in the future.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new documents now show that the maverick member from Muskoka was not alone in subverting accountability. We find out that the cabinet ministers were dividing up the cash and projects without any bureaucratic oversight whatsoever. They turned the cabinet table into a one-stop shop for pork.

What better way for the minister to get his hands on the money than to get one of his friends hired at \$187 an hour to lobby other ministers. Will the minister come clean and tell us how many ministers he and his buddy lobbied in order for him to get his hands on the G8 slush fund?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former minister of infrastructure has been clear. He approved all of these projects. This has been thoroughly aired by the Auditor General. Our government accepts the Auditor General's recommendations and we will improve the process for the future.

In a spirit of generosity, we are also giving the hon. member an opportunity to do the right thing and finally keep his promise to vote in favour of the elimination of the long gun registry as he has promised for so many years.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, after 130 days the fig leaf that the member is hiding behind is looking a little frayed over there because this is about the fact that he got his buddy hired. It was his idea. He called the mayor and said, "hire my buddy". Then what did his buddy do? He started calling the other ministers to get his hands on the cash.

Buddies were hired by the minister, contracts were given on tender and the Auditor General was misled. The minister's fingers are all over this file. Will he release the documents that show who was in the meetings where it was decided how to carve up the money to get his hands on the G8 slush fund?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister responsible for infrastructure has indicated that he approved all of the projects. The matter has been completely aired. We accept the recommendations of the Auditor General to improve the process.

That hon. member has had two chances on his feet today. We have reintroduced legislation to eliminate the long gun registry, which he called for year after year during election time. I ask him to stand a third time and announce that he will keep his word, that he will do the right thing, that he will not break his faith with his constituents and that he will work with us—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Wascana.

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TAXATION

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Bank of Canada today confirmed what the TD Bank, Scotiabank, BMO, the International Monetary Fund and others have said, that economic growth is slowing to a crawl both globally and here in Canada where it is down 25%, and the risk is rising that things could get worse. Canadian jobs are obviously in jeopardy.

Why has the government increased the burden of EI payroll taxes this year by \$600 million? Why is it adding another \$1.2 billion in further job killing payroll taxes next year?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is a surprising question coming from a party that has voted against every single tax reduction the government has brought into effect and in fact continues to oppose measures that are before the House at this time.

Obviously, the fact that we are in a fragile global recovery and that we are anticipating slow growth comes as no surprise to anyone on this side of the House. I welcome the Liberal Party to that realization. I encourage its members to do as we are doing, to focus on jobs and growth, and pass the important tax reduction measures that are before the House of Commons.

*Oral Questions***SENIORS**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a tax credit of \$160 million does not fix a tax increase of \$1.8 billion.

Among the Canadians getting clobbered on the stock market are those with RRSPs withering away. At age 71, they have no choice and must convert their RRSPs into registered income funds and begin reporting them as taxable.

Given the stock market turmoil, will the government show flexibility for seniors, flexibility on the date when RRSPs must be converted to RRIFs and flexibility on the minimum amounts to be taken into income?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again that is a surprising question from a party that has consistently opposed the tax measures that the government has brought in for Canadian seniors, including those as important as the tax-free savings account, income splitting for senior citizens and increases to the guaranteed income supplement.

I would encourage the members of the Liberal Party to support the measures that are before the House and actually support Canadian seniors rather than coming up with excuses as to why they constantly vote against good things for our Canadian seniors.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government announced non-refundable tax credits for volunteer firefighters, caregivers and young people taking art lessons. Unfortunately, these tax credits are discriminatory because low-income Canadians cannot take advantage of them, since they simply do not pay enough taxes. We estimate that it would not cost much to make these tax credits refundable.

Is the government prepared to reconsider that?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again we have a problem with a member not practising what he preaches or in fact an entire party not practising what it preaches.

The volunteer firefighters tax credit was in the budget. We brought forward the budget. We listened to the volunteer firefighters. We listened to our caucus on this side of the House. We brought it in. It was voted on in the House and those members voted against it.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. There is far too much noise coming from that end of the chamber.

The hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians were appalled yesterday to see a troubling video posted on the website of the Parliamentary Secretary to the

Minister of Agriculture. At the very least it was insulting and in the words of national Inuit leader Mary Simon it was “a racist slur”.

In the video a cartoon Wheat Board executive tells a farmer, “Slow down young man. You are talking Eskimo....You cannot do those things in Saskatchewan”. The slur is used not once but three times.

Will the parliamentary secretary please apologize to all Canadians for this slur?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the member that the offending video has been removed. I know the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands would certainly apologize to anyone who found it offensive. However, what he really finds offensive is the opposition's continued hammering at the government for allowing western Canadian farmers the freedom to market their own product. That is untenable.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only is the video insulting to aboriginal people, it insults the intelligence of the majority of farmers who voted to save the Canadian Wheat Board.

Simply taking the video off of the website is not enough. Will the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands or his government do the right thing and apologize to the Inuit people? Will he apologize for his government's arrogant dismissal of farmers' voices who are calling on the government to save the Wheat Board?

After having shown such disrespect, will the government now show respect by allowing farmers to have their voices heard and respected in their—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what we do respect is the right of western Canadian farmers to have the same options as their cousins and colleagues in Ontario. What we are moving for is called fairness, the right to handle one's own product in a way, time, price and place of one's choosing.

I cannot understand why the opposition refuses to see that. Certainly the vast majority of farmers in western Canada are accepting of this. They want to move forward. We are already seeing value-added opportunities being announced. We know that small communities will benefit from this type of opportunity and we will move forward.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Conservatives really believe that prairie grain farmers will make more money by selling their grain outside of the Canadian Wheat Board, then that means every single Conservative MP involved in the grain industry is in a conflict of interest and must recuse themselves from the vote on Bill C-18.

Oral Questions

If it is not true then one must ask why the Conservatives are destroying this great Canadian institution if they do not in fact believe that it will be better for Canadian farmers.

They cannot have it both ways. Which is it, a conflict of interest or a reckless and irresponsible idea that will bring uncertainty and instability to the whole agricultural community of the Prairies?

• (1430)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, farmers will never be intimidated by what I think is a lingering case of beaver fever over there. They will never be intimidated by that. They want to move forward.

The members on this side will never apologize. Farmers and non-farmers alike have banded together on this side of the aisle to move forward with marketing freedom for western Canadian farmers. It is the right thing to do. The timing is right to do it. They will continue to produce that top quality product that is in such demand around the world. We will get the job done in spite of these ridiculous antics.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, coming from a failed ostrich jockey, I do not know what the member knows about beaver fever.

One thing is clear, the government actually has no idea what will happen when it does away with the Wheat Board. It is legislating away a \$6 billion a year successful company without a business plan, without a cost-benefit analysis, without any evidence whatsoever that prairie farmers will actually be better off. If the government has such documentation, why does it not table it in the House?

If the government will allow government MPs who are in a conflict of interest to vote, why will it not let prairie farmers vote on how they want to market their grain themselves?

The Speaker: Order. I think some of these metaphors involving animals may be causing a little disorder in the House. I would urge all hon. members to try to avoid using them so that we can get through question period.

The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is sound advice. Over the top never works.

I will say that farming ostrich allowed me the opportunity to get used to working with the lesser life forms I sometimes see here on the floor of the House of Commons.

Having said that, we are moving ahead with marketing freedom for farmers. They are smart enough to know what is required for their own bottom business line. We will get the job done.

The Speaker: Order. Similarly, those types of comments when referring to our colleagues are also unhelpful during question period.

The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, time and time again the Minister of National Defence fails

to respond to a straightforward question. Why are we buying jets sight unseen, with no tendering process, that cannot even defend the Arctic north?

The F-35 cannot communicate in Canada's north. It cannot even land on Arctic runways. Our military pilots deserve better. Canadians deserve better.

When will the minister learn that he will not get jets that work in Canada's north by dishing out untendered contracts to a company headquartered in America's south?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have another fact-free question from the NDP on the F-35.

The member would know, with a little bit of time and effort and a little research, that the F-35 is the only fifth-generation aircraft available to Canadians. This aircraft will provide sovereignty and security over our Arctic and over our massive coastlines. It is interoperable with our NATO allies.

This is the aircraft that the Royal Canadian Air Force needs. This is the aircraft that this government will give those brave men and women who do that important work.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this minister has no answers.

His “just trust me” approach has gone from incredibly hopeful to ridiculously irresponsible as the government moves ever closer to blowing the budget on these jets that do not even work.

The independent Parliamentary Budget Officer has already pegged the cost overruns at a staggering \$53 million per plane. How many more millions is this minister planning to spend to get working radios on these things, and how much more is he going to spend so that they can land?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is the difference. This is a government that is prepared to spend millions on important equipment that saves lives and provides mission success for members of the Canadian armed forces. That is the difference.

On every occasion over the past five and a half years that we have presented important projects, procurement and investments in men and women and equipment and bases, this member's party has consistently voted against our efforts to support the men and women in uniform.

• (1435)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence needs to clear the air once and for all on his government's plan for the future of military bases.

Oral Questions

Therefore, on behalf of military families and their communities, I have a very straightforward question: will the Minister of National Defence stand in his place today and either confirm or deny that he is considering closing any Canadian military bases?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said time and time again, I am extremely proud of the investments our government has made in the men and women in uniform, and in where they train, where they live and where they work, as well as the equipment they need to do that important work, and we are going to continue to do that.

Everyone knows the NDP's views on the Canadian Forces. The NDP has consistently demonstrated that it is opposed to our government's investments in the military. Time and time again NDP members have stood in here in this House and stood in the way of these important investments, which, by the way, are also important for the Canadian economy. Investments in the F-35 will create thousands of jobs.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we could not have been any clearer in trying to get the minister to be clear his position.

In the absence of a denial, we have to assume that there are plans to close bases, which will cause economic damage across all kinds of communities and hurt our troops.

Therefore, the questions are going to keep coming. There will be questions on how many bases will close and how many jobs will be lost. How will these decisions be made? Will communities get an opportunity to have a say in those decisions?

At a time of economic fear, these troops and communities are now facing the added fear of these base closures, and it is not acceptable.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Hamilton Centre is not new to this place. He should know that raising his voice and expressing bogus outrage do not make these allegations true.

I know we are getting close to Halloween now. I know that the member is a bit of a goblin on this and wants to scare people. It is not happening; we are going to continue to invest.

The Speaker: I think we will have to deal with that after question period, but I do not find the word "goblin" parliamentary.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert.

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence refuses to reassure soldiers and their families who are worried about the closure of some Canadian armed forces bases. The military bases in Bagotville, Valcartier and Montreal support thousands of families and contribute to the economic success of these regions.

Will the minister assure us, here in this House, that these facilities, which are vital to our armed forces, employees and their families, will remain open?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course they will. We have made historic investments in Bagotville. When we did, this party voted against those investments

to build the infrastructure of Bagotville, so they have no credibility whatsoever when they stand up and try to scare members of the Canadian Forces and Canadians about closures.

We are going to continue to invest in the important work of members of the Canadian Forces.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the Prime Minister to show some respect for our prairie farmers. The Prime Minister said no to the plebiscite. The Prime Minister closed debate on the Wheat Board.

My question to the Prime Minister is this: will the Prime Minister agree to conduct committee meetings related to this bill to kill the Wheat Board in the Prairies so that the prairie producers can share their concerns directly?

The government talks about experts; let us bring the committee to the Prairies, where the experts and grain farmers can contribute to this debate. If he has nothing to fear, why does he not do it?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what members on this side of the House do every weekend. We go home and talk to our friends, our families and our neighbours down the road, who are actually farming. That is what we do for fun on the weekends, and, without exception, they continue to tell us to get this job done, to make sure they have marketing freedom, to make sure there is certainty and clarity in the marketplace starting the first of this year. That is what they want for a New Year's resolution.

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• (1440)

CANADA-U.S. RELATIONS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of International Trade is becoming renowned for being surprised and disappointed when awakened to actions by our most important trading partner, the United States. He was surprised and disappointed with buy American, shutting Canadian business out and costing Canadian jobs. Now, after the bill being in Congress for 23 days, he is surprised and disappointed that the United States imposed a \$5.50 fee on all Canadian entries by sea and air.

Would the minister surprise us and not disappoint us by standing up for Canadians?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is not surprising is that the member continues not to stand up for Canadians.

Oral Questions

While that member has been grandstanding in the House, we have been raising this issue with the Americans for some time. As the member should know, the U.S. is sovereign and has a right to impose this tax. However, we have made it very clear that now is not the time to erect new trade barriers. We continue to impress upon the American government that new trade barriers hurt both Canadian and American businesses as well as travellers and workers.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a new study from SFU confirms the evidence coming out of Texas that the Conservative government's misguided punishment policies just will not work. They discriminate heavily against first nations, who already account for a disproportionate percentage of prisoners. The evidence predicts increased prison overcrowding, reduced access to treatment and a higher likelihood of prisoners reoffending.

Expensive, ineffective and discriminatory: that is Bill C-10.

Is the government against evidence, or is it against real solutions for Canada's aboriginal peoples?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our very first priority when it comes to public safety is that of keeping our communities and streets safe for all Canadians.

We have made unprecedented investments in ensuring that those who are in those facilities receive treatment so that they can come out rehabilitated, because that also makes our communities safer. However, we make no apologies for ensuring that we proceed with a program that ensures we keep criminals where they belong until such time as they are safe to return to the community.

We want to keep our communities safe. I am not surprised that the opposition does not share that view.

* * *

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): The government, Mr. Speaker, is ashamed of Canada's history, ashamed of the cherished public broadcaster that has served this country for 75 years. Conservatives have criticized the CBC, bullied it in committee and even cheated Canadians out of celebrating this important milestone. For three-quarters of a century, the CBC has shaped our memories and marked our history, yet Conservatives treat it like an embarrassment.

Can the minister tell us why he denied Canadians their chance to celebrate their CBC?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague is talking about my speech on Canada Day last year, which I wrote myself. Instead of celebrating the CBC, which the member is free to do as he wants, what I chose to say instead in my speech was, "On this Canada Day...to those men and women of the Canadian Forces serving in Afghanistan, in Libya, and other difficult places in the world: to put it simply, you are the bravest and the best, we are proud of your service, and we are honoured by the work that you do for Canada".

That is what I said instead of praising the CBC. I had two minutes, and I stand by my decision.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we would be hard pressed to find a Canadian who did not grow up with at least one favourite CBC show. I am sure that even the minister had his own favourite show. The CBC is one of the best public broadcasters in the world and it has been offering quality programming for 75 years. Canadians are very proud of the CBC. It is an important Canadian institution.

Why do the Conservatives refuse to celebrate it?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as part of its 75th anniversary programming this year, the CBC aired an excellent show on Sir John A. Macdonald. It was very good.

The CBC can celebrate its 75th anniversary. What we would like, as a government elected based on a platform, is a balanced budget and responsible spending and savings. We are therefore asking the CBC to spend taxpayers' money responsibly and respectfully. That is our program and our promise to Canadians. We will keep our promises.

* * *

• (1445)

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government clearly does not have the interests of families and artists at heart.

Our artists make a huge contribution to the development of Canadian society. However, instead of helping them, this government prefers to make their lives difficult. In the bill, artists' royalties are not protected. Distance education is hampered and young people may be subject to large fines.

When will this government protect our artists and reintroduce the levies that were removed, instead of making massive cuts to the arts and culture sector?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member does not understand or does not agree with what I said about our arts and culture policies, perhaps he will agree with Gilbert Rozon, president of Just for Laughs, who said, "Prime Minister Stephen Harper recognizes the role of this sector in the national economy."

[*English*]

Heather Ostertag, the CEO of FACTOR, a music publisher, said that the government has "...clearly demonstrated its commitment to Canadian culture" and that what is provided to Canada in support of artists is the envy of the world. It does not get better than that.

Oral Questions

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to copyright law, we know whose side the government is on. It is not with researchers and educators who rely on non-commercial copying, not with artists who have serious concerns and not with Canadian families who are worried about digital locks being added to the everyday devices they use in their own homes and becoming criminals in their own homes. The government refuses to listen.

Will the government stop protecting major corporations and start putting Canadian consumers first? Will it work with us to amend its bill so that consumers are protected from the arbitrary use of digital locks?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague's comments could not be further from the truth. This legislation, our copyright modernization act, is supported by the Council of Ministers of Education.

The member referenced education in the preamble of his question. He said it is not in the best interests of educators. Then why is it that the NDP education minister for Nova Scotia is endorsing our bill? Why is it that the education ministers across the country—Liberal, Conservative and NDP—are all supporting our bill? It is because it strikes the right balance.

The member said in French as well, although he did not say it in English, that the NDP is opposed to our bill because we are not in favour of putting in place a new iPod tax against consumers. He had better believe we are against that tax. We are going to fight it—

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 17 years ago the former Liberal government introduced a long gun registry. This policy, which was supposed to cost no more than a few million dollars, ballooned to well over \$2 billion of taxpayers' money. On top of the ridiculously inflated cost, this measure does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals and needlessly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters. Conservatives have long promised to end this wasteful and ineffective measure.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please tell this House what he is doing to address this important issue?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that this morning our government tabled a bill to end the long gun registry.

Our Conservative government does not support treating law-abiding outdoors enthusiasts and farmers as if they were criminals. We have consistently opposed the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry, which does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Canadians gave our government a strong mandate in places like Sault Ste. Marie and Nipissing to once and for all end this long gun registry. We are doing what we said we would do.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families will now have to face a new tax every time they fly into the United States. It is an added expense at a time when budgets are already overstretched. Conservatives claim to be serious about dealing with the border thickening, but what do we get? We get higher taxes, more fees and greater wait times.

Why is it that every time the minister returns from Washington, Canadians have to pay the price for Conservative ineptitude at the bargaining table?

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have made it very clear to our American partners that any new taxes and other trade barriers threaten the economic recovery in both our countries.

Last week, the NDP trade critic actually expressed sympathy for the American position on buy American provisions. Instead of expressing sympathy, the NDP should be standing up for ordinary, hard-working Canadians.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government cannot get anything right when it comes to standing up for the interests of everyday Canadians. First there was the buy American fiasco, then tariffs on Vancouver ports and now a new tax on entering the U.S. People taking a family on a trip will be dinged \$5. Small businesses that need to cross the border will be dinged. Snowbirds going south for the winter will be dinged.

My question is: When will the government stop letting the U.S. steamroll over Canadian interests?

• (1450)

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is pretty rich coming from the NDP trade critic.

Let me quote what he said last week. He said that he does not begrudge the United States' taking a protectionist decision. Imagine that, standing up for the Americans rather than standing up for ordinary hard-working Canadians.

We continue to focus on what's important to Canadians. We are focusing on economic growth, and we are focusing on creating jobs for Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is proving once again that it is incapable of defending the interests of Canadian families. Starting next month, Canadians will have to pay a \$5.50 tax every time they cross the border by air or water. Canadians are again the losers with this decision.

Oral Questions

Did Canada have a say in the negotiations? Is the U.S. leading the parade, while Canadian families just have to pay?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while that member has been in this House grandstanding for weeks, I have been in Washington and my colleagues here on this side of the House have been in Washington, connecting with our counterparts and impressing upon the Americans that new trade barriers are bad for business in Canada and bad for business in the United States.

It is only this Conservative government that is standing up for ordinary hard-working Canadians.

The Speaker: Order, please. Members must allow the minister to answer the questions once they have been asked.

The hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

[Translation]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Beauharnois—Salaberry, NDP): Mr. Speaker, our most important trading partner is going to charge us a \$5.50 fee to enter the United States by air or by water. That means that the people in my riding who regularly travel by boat to the U.S. will be penalized by this measure. My constituents just do not understand this move. They already lost one point of access to the United States when the Franklin border crossing was closed.

We do not expect preferential treatment from the American government, but can we at least expect our own government to stand up for our interests?

[English]

Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no one is going to rely on the NDP to stand up for the interests of hard-working Canadians, those who want to travel across the border.

It is only this government that has taken steps to remove the thickening at our border, to move security to the perimeter and strengthen security around our borders. This is the government that stands up for expanding trade opportunities all around the world. I will not take any lessons from the NDP on standing up for Canadians.

* * *

LOBBYING

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, new emails from Vern Freeloader, prepared while on a G8 lobbying—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

I am just going to wait until there is a little bit of order before I recognize the member. I know the member has been enthusiastic. All of question period he has been enthusiastic.

The hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Speaker, new emails from Vern Freeloader, prepared while on a G8 lobbying contract to the mayor of Huntsville, spell out how his buddy, the environment minister, personally told him that the local MP, the industry minister, and a gaggle of other ministers were approving G8 projects. That is a problem for the freelancer, since neither he nor his company is registered to lobby public officials. It is also a problem for the government, but if the government insists no such communication occurred, will the government express its concern that Vern Freeloader may have invoiced the people of Huntsville for lobbying work that was never actually performed? It is one or the other.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has evidence that somebody may have lobbied without registering, I suggest that he contact the lobbyists registrar.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite the assertion of the Minister of Agriculture, the insulting video is still on the website of the parliamentary secretary, in the video gallery.

When will these racial slurs be removed from the website, and when will the parliamentary secretary stand in the House and apologize to all Canadians and to the Minister of Health and all the people she represents?

•(1455)

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was assured that the video had been removed. I will certainly check after question period. If it has not, it will be coming down.

* * *

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Kennedy Stewart (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Kinder Morgan is set to double the capacity of the Trans Mountain pipeline that runs from Edmonton to Burnaby. Residents and local municipalities are concerned about what this project could mean for the local environment, especially in the wake of the 2007 oil spill that forced the evacuation of hundreds of Burnaby residents and leaked oil into Burrard Inlet.

Will the minister agree to full public consultation on this project, including direct talks with affected municipalities and first nations?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every major project is reviewed by a regulatory agency. Our government respects the regulatory process, and that will proceed in every case.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months now, people in my riding have been seeing leaks in the pipeline that crosses Brome—Missisquoi. This pipeline is close to a waterway, the Missisquoi River. In an inspection report dated May 20, engineers from the National Energy Board raised doubts about the company's ability to detect and stop the leaks, even though the company is responsible for them.

What does the government intend to do to reassure the residents about the safety of the pipeline?

Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Board is a strong, independent regulatory body. Its mandate is to ensure the safety and security of pipelines, from the moment they are proposed until they are abandoned.

[English]

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week our government introduced the historic marketing freedom for grain farmers act in the House. Unfortunately, this past week has shown a desperate opposition willing to pull any underhanded trick in the book to try to undo last night's vote on the bill.

Yesterday the member for Winnipeg Centre said, "There are ways to reverse a vote".

Can the Minister of Agriculture please explain why our government will not be bullied by the NDP on this very important legislation?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Palliser is absolutely right. The opposition will stop at nothing to try to intimidate farmers, whether they are sitting in the House or out in western Canada, not to move ahead with marketing freedom, but of course they do not represent them.

Having said that, the member for Winnipeg Centre also went out afterward and recanted saying his actions are purely political and not grounded in reality. What he did then was actually say about the Conservative MPs, who he is trying to sideline, "They wouldn't be in a conflict of interest". So I am not sure whether he is on or he is off, but we do know that he is wrong. We agree that farmers will never be intimidated by those kinds of ridiculous tactics.

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, certain provinces, like Quebec, have expressed concern about plans to abolish the gun registry and are considering creating their own registries. Now the government wants to throw out the baby with the bathwater and destroy all of the valuable information that has been duly collected and is ever so useful to police forces.

Will the government put an end to its completely irrational behaviour and hand over the valuable information from the Canadian registry, if the provinces ask for it?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is no. Our government refuses to treat law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters like criminals. The provincial governments are free to act in their areas of jurisdiction, but we will not help them create another registry by the back door. The information in our possession will be destroyed and the registry will be abolished once and for all.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, although all Canadians are feeling the adverse effects of economic uncertainty, students are also being hit hard by the high rate of unemployment and an average student debt in excess of \$25,000 and rising. Using the excuse that the Conservatives are doing better than the previous government is insulting. The reality is they are not doing enough.

When will this government truly help the next generation, which is being crushed by debt?

• (1500)

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the balance sheet as to who has done what.

Our government brought in the Canada summer student grants program to help students access post-secondary education at a lower cost and without debt. We overhauled the Canada student loan program to streamline it, to make more students qualify and to help them repay it earlier.

We also increased the numbers of jobs available to students, so they could help finance their own way through university.

That is our record. What is the record of the NDP members? They voted against every single one of those ways to help students. Shame on them.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our Conservative government has made unprecedented investments in Canada's armed forces. Our commitment to rebuilding their capacity, after a decade of darkness, is ensuring that our brave men and women have the tools they need.

The work to supply this equipment is also providing an incredible boost to the Canadian economy. Could the Minister of National Defence please inform the House of recent developments on the economic benefits of the F-35 program?

Points of Order

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my friend from Winnipeg is right. Our government has committed to provide the air force with the F-35 and has enabled Canadian companies to compete for large-scale contracts to help build the aircraft for the global supply chain.

Today, Bristol Aerospace in Winnipeg celebrated the opening of its new advanced composites manufacturing centre, which will house the production lines for parts as well as the assembly of the horizontal tail structure for the F-35.

This work at Bristol, we are told, will create 100 new jobs. Our government is proud to stand with Canadians and for the Canadian economy and the Canadian Forces.

We wish the opposition would stop fearmongering and support—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

* * *

[Translation]

ATLANTIC CANADA OPPORTUNITIES AGENCY

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, according to the Minister of State for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, the positions being eliminated by the Conservatives within the agency do not constitute “reckless cuts”.

For months now, we keep hearing the Conservatives say that their priority is the economy, yet now they are making cuts to an agency that promotes the economy.

Can the minister tell us what he would call responsible cuts within the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised, because I thought the NDP member from Atlantic Canada was going to rise to congratulate the government on its shipbuilding strategy, which will create thousands of jobs across the country.

This surprises me, but I want to reassure the member that the jobs that will be eliminated at the agency will not affect services to businesses and communities in Atlantic Canada, and that is what matters. Only the employees' union is complaining, while businesspeople and job creators continue to applaud us.

* * *

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in addition to opposing the Bloc Québécois's bill on the application of Bill 101 to companies under federal jurisdiction, the government, with the help of the NDP, appointed a unilingual anglophone judge to the Supreme Court. Now, the government is at it again with the appointment of an auditor general who does not speak French.

When will the Prime Minister respect our language, French, and stop treating Quebecers like second-class citizens?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as always, our government makes appointments based on merit, and the top priority is to provide Canadians with the best service.

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I wish to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the Ladies Gallery of Mr. Rick Hansen, on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the Man in Motion World Tour.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

•(1505)

POINTS OF ORDER**ORAL QUESTIONS**

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I noted your admonition in question period, with respect to a question and my response. Certainly, in the presence of such an esteemed Canadian as Mr. Hansen, and out of respect for you and this House, I want to withdraw that word.

However, I did look the word up. “Goblin” refers to a small, mischievous supernatural creature that makes trouble for human beings.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: I thank the minister for his withdrawal. However, I would caution him that the comments that followed were certainly unhelpful.

I understand the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans is also rising on a point of order.

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I understand that what we say here is covered by immunity, especially on this day when you had warned members on a few occasions about being careful regarding their language. I would invite you to look at the blues for the question that was asked by the member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, where he, twice, attacked a very serious servant of this community.

As a former municipal councillor myself, I know how hard municipal servants work. This man across the way, probably in the noise of all the others from that third party, attacked the mayor of an Ontario municipality by calling him names. It was not a *lapseus linguae*. He did it twice.

I invite you, Mr. Speaker, respectfully, to read the blues.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, no such attack occurred on any mayor.

In fact, the mayor of Huntsville was very forthcoming in providing information to this Parliament, to Canadians, through the Access to Information Act.

Business of Supply

We have not been able to get much information out of the government quarters about anything related to the G8 summit and the spending therein. However, it has been noted that as a result of the exchange of information, the emails that were produced in accordance with the request that was put in through the Access to Information Act, we learned—

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Just say sorry, Gerry.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: I will answer the charges which were brought forward, if the member would not mind.

We learned that the consultant in question did indicate that he had direct and personal communication with a minister of the Crown, yet he had no such availability under the—

The Speaker: Order. I am going to stop the member there because it sounds like it is just a continuation of a debate of facts. I will look at the blues and see what types of words were used and to whom they were directed, and come back to the House, if necessary.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the member for Churchill has called this debate because it allows me to explain to the House why our government is moving forward on marketing freedom and to dispel some of the myths that surround this issue.

Our government has been open and transparent about our commitment to marketing freedom from day one, through four elections and countless interactions with Canadians along the way. We welcome this debate as part of our commitment to clearly communicate our reasons for moving forward on marketing freedom.

To briefly address this motion, supply management and the Canadian Wheat Board are totally different issues. Unlike the opposition, we have done more than talk about our support on supply management. We have consistently defended Canada's right to this marketing system at different international meetings, including the World Trade Organization and most recently the Cairns group meeting held in September in Saskatoon.

We have just received a letter addressed to the Prime Minister and to the leaders of all the parties in the House from the president of Dairy Farmers of Canada, which I will read into the record. It is about supply management.

We are urgently writing to you today in response to the discourse that has been taking place and is having an unintended negative impact on supply management. We do not want our system to be drawn into discussions on other collective marketing systems such as the Canadian Wheat Board.

There are key distinctions between the various marketing models and justice is not served to any model, or the farmers that operate within those systems, when they are not considered in their full and distinct context. We are fortunate to operate within a dairy supply management model that is strongly supported by all partners in the system—farmers, processors and government.

Dairy farmers appreciate the strong support of all political parties for the supply management system. We also appreciate the repeated support and demonstrated willingness of the federal government to defend supply management both domestically and internationally. We do not question this government's support for our system. We have accepted the clear policy intentions that the government has stated in several throne speeches.

We are instead focused on working with the government and our sector partners to ensure that we continue to have a strong and profitable dairy sector in Canada. We strongly reject all attacks and misinformation that is advanced by other self-interested organizations that are not interested in having a strong Canadian dairy sector where farmers are able to get their returns directly from the marketplace.

We hope we can continue to count on all political parties and parliamentarians as we work on continued success in the Canadian dairy sector.

Yours sincerely,

Wally Smith

President.

I would also like to address the other part of the member's motion regarding the Canadian Wheat Board's plebiscite.

The Canadian Wheat Board announced the results of its expensive survey. It is interesting that according to the Canadian Wheat Board's spring survey some 58% of wheat producers and 62% of barley producers favoured a dual and/or open market system. The Canadian Wheat Board's so-called plebiscite did not even give producers the option of selecting marketing choice, even though the Canadian Wheat Board knows that marketing choice is preferred by producers.

Whatever the numbers say, this debate is about rights not rhetoric. The rights of one group should never be allowed to silence the rights of another. Farmers should not run the risk of jail time for driving our economy. We are listening to all farmers, including the thousands who did not vote in a plebiscite that the Canadian Wheat Board's own director says is non-binding.

Should farmers have the right to voluntarily market their grain through the Canadian Wheat Board? Absolutely. That is why our government intends to let every farmer have the right to choose how to market their grain, whether it is individually or through a voluntary pooling equity.

Farmers who wish to continue marketing their grain through a viable Canadian Wheat Board would be greatly advantaged if the board would stop wasting time and instead get to work on ensuring a smooth transition to an open market. After all, western Canadian farmers help feed the world. They deserve the freedom to make their own business decisions.

Our government was elected on a mandate to provide western Canadian farmers marketing freedom and we intend to deliver on that promise.

The transition to marketing choice for farmers will provide opportunities for farmers and is a key component of the work that this government is doing to ensure Canada's competitiveness in an increasingly globalized marketplace.

Business of Supply

The Government of Canada firmly believes that freer trade is key to securing the success of the Canadian economy. Trade enhances domestic competitiveness, improves productivity, raises real wages, and provides consumers with more choice at lower prices.

Participation in global commerce has helped Canadians build a strong, stable economy that boasts leading edge companies, a highly skilled and educated workforce, world-class financial infrastructure, and top quality research and development facilities.

Our government knows that Canada's long-term prosperity is driven by the ingenuity and creativity of hard-working families, small business owners, entrepreneurs and farmers across the country.

It is about time that western Canadian grain farmers stopped being treated like second class citizens and had the same rights as farmers in other parts of Canada and around the world.

• (1510)

Marketing freedom is ultimately about rights, but it is about the economy, too. Canadian farmers have been the backbone of Canada's economy for generations. They provide families across this country and around the world with the safest, high quality food. Despite the many challenges they face, they continue to dedicate themselves to their farm businesses and in doing so help keep our economy stable.

Canada's grain industry is a powerhouse that brings \$16 billion to the farm gate and makes up almost half of our agricultural exports. What was once Canada's signature crop, wheat, has fallen behind. Grain innovation has become stagnant. Competition for acres has weakened. New crops, such as canola, have surpassed wheat in value.

With the reduced market share, the Canadian Wheat Board has less influence on the world stage. As a result, it has become a price taker rather than a price setter.

Let us look at some of the successes in crops that are marketed by farmers independent of the Canadian Wheat Board. We need to remember that non-board crops make up a full two-thirds of Canadian farmers' farm cash receipts from grain.

From 1989 to 2010, the area ceded to canola has increased by a staggering 233%. Meanwhile, Canada's pulse industry has gone from negligible in the 1980s to becoming a significant world exporter in 2010, with \$2 billion in export sales last year. Combined, these industries are bringing real dollars to the farm gate and creating jobs right across Canada.

Let us look at what happened to oats when it came out from under the monopoly. In Manitoba alone, the acreage of oats has increased by 175,000 acres since its removal from the Wheat Board's control. This has allowed for the opening and expansion of Can-Oat, a processing mill in Portage la Prairie.

These are the types of value-added industries and jobs that exist when farmers have the option to market their products as they see fit.

Our government simply wants to give western wheat and barley farmers their chance to stand alongside canola, pulse and oat farmers

in marketing their products to world markets the way they see fit. We want to give all farmers every opportunity to succeed.

Marketing freedom is about rights and the economy. It is also about innovation. We have seen how innovation has driven value-added processing in other crops, such as oats and canola. Well, marketing freedom will unlock this potential for our barley and wheat growers as well.

Farmer entrepreneurs will be able to target new untapped niche markets for their wheat and barley through speciality pools, value-added investments and other innovative strategies. They will work with the entire value chain to attract new investment to the Prairies, create new jobs, revitalize rural communities, and grow wealth in western Canada.

That is the power of innovation, and that is why our government is supporting marketing freedom. Giving farmers the option to determine where and how they sell their products comes down to sound forward-thinking, and a realistic and optimistic view of agriculture in today's marketplace.

Over the past year we have demonstrated our support for farmers through significant investments in research, innovation and marketing. For example, we are keeping our wheat producers on the leading edge of innovation through investments in the wheat genome and fusarium resistant varieties.

These kinds of investments represent our unwavering commitment to moving the grain industry forward so that farmers can continue to succeed in markets here at home and around the world.

Many of our leading edge innovations in wheat and barley have come from the great work of Canadian International Grains Institute, the Canadian Malting Barley Technical Centre, and the Western Grains Research Foundation. This great work will continue under marketing freedom.

As we work through the transition, we are making every effort to ensure the certainty and clarity producers need to plan their businesses for the coming year. Producers need to know that the financial tools they rely on will be there when they need them.

As I said at the outset, we need to cut through the rhetoric and focus on the road ahead. The future looks bright. Demand and opportunity are growing in our agricultural industry as never before. Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia governments, representing up to 85% of the wheat and barley grown in western Canada, support the move to marketing freedom.

Our government will continue to work with the entire value chain, including the Canadian Wheat Board to ensure that every farmer has marketing freedom. The Canadian Wheat Board is welcome to be part of the solution, but we will not waver from our commitment to marketing freedom.

Business of Supply

In this open market, all farmers will be able to choose how they market their grain, whether it is individually or through a pooling entity. This is the choice that farmers have asked for, and that is what we intend to deliver.

Right around the world, we are working hard to unfetter our grain farmers from the shackles of protectionism through free trade agreements with key customers in South America, Africa and elsewhere.

We recognize that this is a major change for agriculture in western Canada. Canadian farmers have proven time after time that they can compete and succeed in the global marketplace if they have a level playing field.

• (1515)

That is why our government is working so hard to build new opportunities in global markets. We want to ensure that our farmers and food processors can continue to deliver their high-quality products to consumers around the world. Market access is a priority for this government and we are working closely with industry both to develop new markets for agricultural goods and to expand existing ones.

Just this week we issued a report that outlines Canada's successes in market development and the results are very good. The report reflects our government's commitment to improving the profitability, competitiveness and trade opportunities for the Canadian sector. It highlights accomplishments in 10 different markets for commodities, including beef, pork, canola, wheat, pulses and animal genetics.

For example, in 2010 the government negotiated a new duty-free access for Canadian hormone-free beef to the European Union. As of July 2011, this new access had resulted in shipments of approximately 626 tonnes of Canadian beef worth almost \$5 million.

As well, we increased access for Canadian beef to the Russian market. Consequently, our beef exports to Russia have tripled, 328% by value, and surpassed \$23 million in 2010.

We obtained a stable trading environment with China for canola, and negotiated transitional measures for canola seed exports. This helped to maintain our market for exports of canola seed, oil and meal to China which exceeded \$1.8 billion in both 2009 and 2010.

We also secured a breakthrough agreement with China to allow staged market access for beef and tallow. When fully implemented, this may be worth an estimated \$110 million annually.

In 2010 we were the fifth largest agricultural and agrifood exporter, with exports worth over \$36 billion.

Canadian farmers have asked for tools and options to compete globally and that is what we are providing. Canada's exporters, investors and service providers are calling for opportunities. Business owners and entrepreneurs want access to global markets and this government is listening.

These successes on the international scene benefit Canadian farmers and exporters and contribute to our economic growth. Our government is very proud of that and so is industry.

Following the release of the market access report, Travis Toews, the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, thanked the ministers for agriculture and trade, and I quote:

...for working hard to create that access for us. I appreciate [their] continued emphasis...on improving and maintaining market access for Canadian farmers and ranchers.

Likewise, the Canadian Meat Council, said it is:

...very grateful for the consistent hard work and dedicated persistence of the Government of Canada in securing and expanding foreign market access for Canadian beef and pork products between January, 2010 and March 2011.

In addition to the achievements I just mentioned, last summer we announced a breakthrough in restoring long-awaited access to the lucrative South Korean beef market, as well as access to the Vietnamese market for live breeding cattle, sheep and goats.

Opening and expanding markets around the world creates opportunities for our farmers to drive the Canadian economy and it helps all Canadians by creating jobs and prosperity. Our government works hard to ensure that our farmers and food processors can continue to deliver their high-quality products to consumers around the world. By reopening, maintaining and expanding international markets, we are making sure that Canadian farmers can contribute to this country's economic growth and make their living from the marketplace, not the mailbox.

We want Canadian farmers and processors to get the credit they deserve for the high-quality products they bring to market. Our agricultural exporters are innovative and competitive and we are working with them to expand their markets.

Canada is working on all fronts to boost our agricultural business around the world. We have already announced branding strategies in Japan, Mexico and Korea. These dollars are supporting market research, advertising, store features, culinary tourism and other promotional activities that bolster the work being done by Canadian industry to sell its products. Opening and expanding markets around the world creates opportunities for our producers to drive the Canadian economy.

There are challenges facing the industry, but the long-term signs are positive. During this time of global economic uncertainty, we have to maximize trade opportunities on the world stage. The marketing freedom for grain farmers bill is another way in which this government is providing opportunities for our farmers to shine both at home and internationally. I hope my colleagues in the House of Commons will support this important piece of legislation and not support the motion from the NDP. In supporting the legislation, they would be supporting western Canadian farmers who produce some of the best wheat and barley the world has to offer.

Business of Supply

• (1520)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I found that speech to be quite interesting. I am a very strong advocate for supply management. I see the value of the dairy industry just as I see the value of wheat farmers and the Canadian Wheat Board.

Many of the arguments the government is using today to get rid of the Wheat Board can and in all likelihood at some point in time will be used by a Conservative regime, whether it is this one or another in the future, to get rid of supply management. I believe that there is great value for both. When the member says we should stop treating farmers as second-class citizens, my challenge to the member and the government is to do just that: stop treating our prairie grain farmers as second-class citizens.

If the government believes that it is on the right side of this debate, why does it not listen to over 20,000 prairie grain farmers who want the government to respect the role the Canadian Wheat Board plays today? Does he not believe that those farmers have a right to have their opinions respected? Does he not see the benefit of allowing them to have a plebiscite?

• (1525)

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, this government certainly does respect farmers. There are many farmers on this side of the House who speak to their colleagues every weekend when they go home. They spoke to us on May 2 when 51 out of 56 rural ridings returned this government to majority status in the House of Commons. The farmers in those ridings understand that we ran our campaign on giving western farmers the same marketing freedom that farmers in the rest of Canada and around the world have. That is freedom and that is farmers talking with their votes.

We respect the Canadian Wheat Board and the job that it does. That is why we are proposing that the Canadian Wheat Board be part of the solution. We are proposing that farmers have the freedom to use the Canadian Wheat Board if it as good as people think it is. I have no doubt that many will choose to use it and that is their option. If the Canadian Wheat Board provides a service that the farmers can rely on and trust and can get them the best price now and into the future, the Canadian Wheat Board will be part of the solution. That is up to the Canadian Wheat Board.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noticed at the beginning of my colleague's very informed speech he mentioned about getting beyond the rhetoric and that he wanted to dispel the myths.

I have sat through the debate today and many times I have heard misinformation being given by the opposition members of Parliament. I have heard phrases today that we are abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board, that we are ending the Canadian Wheat Board, that the Canadian Wheat Board will be gone, that we are dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board, that we are getting rid of the Canadian Wheat Board, that we are destroying the Canadian Wheat Board.

The truth is that we are not ending, abolishing, dismantling, getting rid of, or destroying the Canadian Wheat Board. Canadians expect us to provide factual information, not to give misleading information to other members of the House, or more importantly, to Canadians who may be observing and reading the proceedings of the House.

I want my colleague to confirm that in fact we are simply giving western grain farmers marketing freedom. Also, would he like to speculate as to why in the world opposition members would be opposed to giving farmers the freedom to market the very products they are producing?

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, the member for Kitchener—Conestoga is quite right. The bill is not about abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board, full stop. Members across the way are using their rhetorical slurs to suggest that is what we are doing. We are absolutely not doing that. All we are doing is giving western Canadian farmers the same freedom that farmers in eastern Canada have. Why should they not have the same freedom? That is totally undemocratic. It is counter to everything that all Canadians who believe in freedom, free enterprise and opportunity should be standing up for.

I really cannot understand why people such as the member for Malpeque, who is fond of chirping in the House, would be opposed to giving Canadians freedom. Canadians in his riding have that freedom. Why should Canadians in my part of the country not have the same freedom? We are not abolishing the Wheat Board. There is a five year transition. Opposition members are welcome to be part of the process. They should stop this nonsense and get on with it.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not an issue specifically on what the member was saying regarding the Canadian Wheat Board. This is an issue of giving farmers their voice. In the current act under section 47.1, they have the right to determine their own destiny with a proper vote called by the minister on a question tabled by the minister. The government is disallowing that right.

In terms of the Ontario Wheat Board, farmers had the right to vote. In terms of supply management, farmers had the right to vote. In this case, the government is denying farmers the right to have their say which was granted to them by law in 1997.

What are the minister and members on that side afraid of? Are you afraid? The government has not won one election yet relative to the Wheat Board. Eight out of ten of the farmer-elected directors are pro-board and the government is going to fire them. Why do you not give farmers a voice?

The Speaker: Order. I would just remind the hon. member to address his comments through the chair and not directly at other members.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, this really is about freedom. He talked about farmers voting. Farmers did vote. Fifty-one out of fifty-six rural ridings in Canada returned government members who ran on giving farmers freedom.

Business of Supply

The legislation he is talking about refers to a commodity being added or subtracted. That is the kind of vote it talks about. It is not talking about basic freedom for farmers to market their produce. They will vote with how they market their produce. That will determine the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. If the Canadian Wheat Board serves their purposes, it will survive. If it does not, it will not. That is free enterprise. That is freedom. That is what Canada should stand for. That is what the member should stand for, for farmers in Alberta, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, just like farmers in Prince Edward Island. If he does not, I have no idea where he is coming from.

• (1530)

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is in regard to an issue that is very near and dear to my heart. It is because I hear on an ongoing basis the calls from my constituents for farmers to have the opportunity to make the decision and to have control over their own destiny.

I just met with some constituents in the lobby who were here with some friends from Ontario. We had a discussion about the Wheat Board. My constituents were asking when the legislation is finally going to be in place, when they will have an opportunity to market their own wheat and barley. Their friend from Ontario turned to them and said, "What are you talking about? We've always had that freedom". The person from Alberta said, "Well no, you do in Ontario, but we in western Canada do not."

The person from Ontario was outraged and could not imagine that. The person said, "Sometimes we use the wheat board in Ontario and sometimes we choose not to. It depends on what is in our best interests as farmers. We have full determination over what we are going to do. The choice is ours on an annual basis. On a daily basis we can choose if we sell a bit on the board and if we sell a bit to the miller down the road". The Albertan said, "Isn't it an interesting country where we don't have that same freedom across this country."

Let us talk a bit about that freedom. It is the freedom especially that young farmers, people producing in my community, are demanding. I wonder if the hon. member can talk about the freedom Ontario farmers have that Albertans do not.

Hon. Laurie Hawn: Madam Speaker, I will just reiterate some of the things we talked about earlier. This is a simple matter of freedom. It is a simple matter of choice. It is a simple matter of treating all Canadians the same.

I am not surprised at the story from my young friend from northern Alberta about Ontario farmers being amazed that western farmers do not have the same rights that they have had forever.

I am amazed too, that we would have such opposition in this place to what is simply a matter of freedom and equality for Canadian farmers across the country. That is what our government stands for. That is what Canadians stand for: freedom and equality. I really cannot understand where those folks are coming from.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague, the member for Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier.

I stand in support of the motion tabled by the member for Churchill. It is a motion requesting the government to observe

democracy and the rule of law, and I intend to address my comments in that direction.

The government is very fond of the use of euphemisms. We heard many euphemisms when it dealt with its Criminal Code bills, but the euphemism in this case, the use of the word "freedom", which appears at least a dozen times in each of the speeches by government members, is an abuse of the term given the way it is moving forward in its legislation and the very nature of that legislation.

Before the government evolved from the Reform Party to the Canadian Alliance Party to the Conservative Party without the word "Progressive", it was very fond of talking about and actually ran on a platform of transparency and grassroots democracy. Many of my constituents were drawn to and interested in the party when the members said that enough of those with money in central Canada making the decisions for the party. They said that it was time to have transparency and decision-making and to have a place at the table for Canadians who are directly affected.

Therefore, when the Conservatives stand and say that they are tabling this measure to essentially get rid of the Wheat Board by delisting wheat from the work of the Wheat Board and eventually phasing it out or, to use their favourite term, streamlining the Wheat Board, it is not freedom at all.

Why do I say that? Previously on this bill, I shared with the House information that was provided to me by the major national agricultural organizations in this country. The National Farmers Union very clearly said:

It is simply bad public policy to eliminate something as beneficial as the CWB. Why would [the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food] spend his time and our tax dollars to do something this harmful to our economy and farmers?

The Agricultural Producers Association of Saskatchewan advised that farmers vote for the Wheat Board. The president of that association said:

Producers have now sent a very clear message to government. So if government chooses to ignore the message and we do see the loss of the single desk, we're concerned about the transitional issues that will result.

He further stated that they are opposed to this move.

Wild Rose Agricultural Producers, Alberta's largest producer funded, general farm organization, very clearly opposes the government's move. It states:

WRAP has consistently maintained that farmers should be afforded meaningful consultation and involvement in any decisions that directly affect their livelihoods. The results of the CWB vote clearly demonstrate that western Canadian grain producers want to retain single desk marketing for their wheat and barley.

Prairie farmers deserve the same consideration as grain producers in Ontario and Quebec – the latitude to determine the fate of their marketing system. This plebiscite was coordinated by a reputable third party and the results are valid.

The Canadian Federation of Agriculture also has decried the move by the government. The Federation of Agriculture stated:

Business of Supply

The CFA believes the farmers' voice in the single-desk issue should be formally represented and respected, as any change to the single-desk would directly impact the business plans and livelihoods of farmers across Western Canada.

While the government berates other nations around the world for not respecting democracy and, by the very definition of democracy, grassroots and giving those impacted by their decisions a voice, how can it call this freedom?

The next important point is the observance of rule of law. There are clear definitions through the United Nations. How does one define a democracy? How does one enter the United Nations. One agrees to and signs on to abide by the rule of law.

•(1535)

Astoundingly, in the House last week, in response to a question by the leader of the official opposition, the Prime Minister stood in the House and said:

...the law of our constitutional system is extremely clear. A previous government cannot bind a future government to its policy.

That is true. Any government has the right to table new legislation and to change the law of the land, but what the present government or any other government does not have the right to do is to thumb its nose at the law that is in place and in effect.

The law that is in place and in effect in this country under the Canadian Wheat Board Act, 1985, as amended, section 47.1, which has been pointed out a number of times in the House, is very clear. It is a very unusual provision in Canadian law to precisely impose a mandatory obligation on an official to consult before he or she makes a specific decision. This provision was added to the act. It was updated. In other words, this is not an outdated provision, which the government has tried to suggest. It has also tried to suggest that it is not keeping up with modern times. That provision specifically requires that a minister, before he or she decides to exclude any kind, type, class or grade of wheat or barley from the Wheat Board, must allow the producers of the grain to have voted in favour of the specific exclusion or extension.

In this House, we have heard over and over that the government's idea of democracy is, once every four years, maybe earlier if it breaks its fixed election act again, is all that counts. The Conservatives are asking us to delve into the mind of the Canadian voters and make up the reasons they voted. I would say that is not democracy. What is democracy and what is the rule of law is that the government must obey the law in effect and it has clearly violated that law.

The Conservatives' next argument is economics. What my question would be is economics for whom? We hear from farmer after farmer with concerns that this move may harm them. I need only remind the members in the House, particularly from Alberta, that that was a promise made by the Government of Alberta when it deregulated the delivery of electricity at the retail level. It said that we were not to worry, that it would deregulate, that there would be all this competition out there and we would get the cheapest electricity in Canada. When it deregulated, the costs quadrupled. Deregulation is not a route to protecting the equity and fairness to Canadians, and certainly not to farmers.

We have heard that the farmers support the direction in which the government is going. The hon. member for Peace River just shared with us that he consulted with his constituents. Perhaps he failed to talk to Nathan Macklin, a grain farmer from DeBolt, Alberta, who farms next door to the member's farm. He told me that he was extremely concerned about increased costs to his farming operation and the loss of a democratic organization that advocates for farmers. He had three specific concerns about increased costs.

First, the Canadian Wheat Board now enables farmers like him to load the grain directly on to producer cars, bypassing the high fees charge by elevators owned by the big grain companies.

Second, Canadian wheat is a high quality product and the Canadian Wheat Board is able to sell it at a better price to premium markets in Europe and Asia. These higher profits are passed back to the farmers.

Third, the Wheat Board can negotiate better transportation rates, something farmers are powerless to do on their own.

Where is the cost analysis for this farmer assuring him that by taking away the Canadian Wheat Board in this area it would enable him to do better?

The second farmer from central Alberta, Ken Larson, fourth generation Alberta grain farmer, has the same issues. He asks, "Why are we taking democracy out of the Canadian Wheat Board by getting rid of the farmer elected directors? The majority of farmers have always been in favour of the Wheat Board".

He has a blog and he has been remonstrating against this. He is a very straightlaced farmer. I respect his wishes and I respect the farmers who contacted me.

In my final comment, the first person who contacted me after I was elected the first time in 2008 was a retired farmer from the Camrose area, and he said, "Miss Duncan, please save the Wheat Board".

•(1540)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I just did an interview with Barry Wilson of *The Western Producer* and he asked me how long I had been involved with the Wheat Board file. I have been involved since 1973. I remember the Saskatchewan wheat pool at one point in time, the Manitoba pool and the Alberta pool, and how their whole system was paid for with no debt by prairie producers. They were big and powerful at the time and they were an economic powerhouse. Today, they are gone.

The Wheat Board is the core in the middle that protects prairie grain farmers from the big railways, from the likes of Viterra, from Cargill and so on. Viterra today may think it is big and mighty, like the Saskatchewan wheat pool did at one time, but I am saying in the House right now that within five years it had better watch out. Who will pay the price? It will primarily be western producers.

Who does the member think will defend farmers in western Canada? Who has the political and economic clout to do it if the Wheat Board is destroyed, as Bill C-18 would do?

Business of Supply

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, that was the very reason for the creation of the Wheat Board and the creation of such co-operative ventures where those who are directly affected have a voice. It is a unique institution where the farmers elected the board to speak on their behalf and they could hold them accountable.

The government says that it believes in accountability, transparency and grassroots participation but it is taking away the very mechanism that could stand up for the farmers who would be impacted. Who do I think will speak for them? It will not be the government. It has a reputation for standing up for big banks and big investors, not the small farmer.

•(1545)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank the hon. member for her very interesting speech, which provided a great deal of insight into the position of the vast majority of prairie farmers.

[*English*]

I just do not get it. Why does the government want to do something to a board that is so important for the farmers without asking them or considering what we have already asked them? How can it do that without asking farmers what they want with this institution that is there for them?

Ms. Linda Duncan: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the recommendations that she has made in the course of the discussion on this reprehensible move by the government.

I would take one step further. I and many members of the House are trained as lawyers. I am stunned that the government would violate the law in bringing about this change. The law is clear and it is direct. It obligates the government to hold a plebiscite. The government would not honour the plebiscite that the farmers did, which they had to do because the government would not deliver one. It could simply endorse that or hold its own.

We have a clear case where the government is trying to hold up to show other countries around the world that this is how democracy is done. It is absolutely shameful.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona for her lovely speech, which, as the other hon. member mentioned, provided a great deal of insight into the terrible situation prairie farmers will find themselves in if the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled.

I am rising in the House today, as many of my NDP colleagues have done, to oppose the Conservatives' bill to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board. I come from a riding with many farmers and family farms. They are having a great deal of difficulty in the current economic context. I am therefore very much aware of the concerns of farmers across the country.

Bill C-18 wants to rip apart the Wheat Board and eliminate the single desk marketing system for wheat and barley in Canada. This bill clearly shows that the Conservatives are completely out of touch and do not understand the needs of Canadian farmers.

The Wheat Board is the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world. In 2009-10, it generated approximately \$5.2 billion in revenue. That is a lot of money. The government needs to take this into account when considering the possibility of dismantling certain extremely important components of the Canadian Wheat Board. The single desk system that the Wheat Board offers is very important to the Prairies. The Wheat Board provides financial stability for farmers, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply.

The Wheat Board has become an essential structure for western Canadian farmers. It is a need. The Wheat Board is truly helping farmers to survive in the difficult economic context we are experiencing right now. The Canadian Wheat Board is controlled, run and funded by farmers. Canadian taxpayers are not paying for this essential structure. Farmers fund operations out of revenue from grain sales.

Are the Conservatives afraid of the collective approach that farmers have chosen to take? I understand that this is not a concept that is overly familiar to them or that they appreciate, but it is something that is at the very core of western farmers' values. In addition, do the Conservatives not understand that it is more advantageous to work together than to adopt an "every man for himself" approach? That is a good question.

For western farmers, the Wheat Board is an effective way to maximize the price of grain. The board's size and power on the market allow it to negotiate internationally and to ensure fair access to the market for all producers.

Why is the Conservative government refusing to respect the wishes of farmers in western Canada? Why is this government ignoring the strong voice of farmers who are speaking out against the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board?

As we have heard many times in this House, the Wheat Board recently held a plebiscite of its members. The results, released on September 12, showed that 62% of respondents wanted to maintain the single desk for marketing wheat and 51% wanted to maintain the single desk for barley. Those two percentages constitute more than a majority. The participation rate in the plebiscite was 56%, which is equivalent to the rate in the last three federal elections. But the Conservative government is constantly bragging about receiving a strong mandate from Canadians with a participation rate similar to what was obtained by the Canadian Wheat Board. Why does this participation rate work in one case and not in the other? This is another one of the Conservatives' classic double standards, which are part of its divide and conquer strategy.

Western farmers have spoken and they oppose Bill C-18, like all of my colleagues here. They want to keep the board's single desk system.

The Conservatives are saying that their bill will make it easier for farmers to market their grain by allowing them to choose to whom they sell their products and how. That is false. It will only create more problems. They have a structure that allows them to pool their resources and make sure they are getting the best prices, with all the strength of their combined resources.

Business of Supply

• (1550)

Leaving farmers to fend for themselves would only create other problems, and their lives are hard enough already.

I am aware of the financial difficulties facing family farms in Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier. My constituents come and see me in my office in Pont-Rouge to talk about this situation, since they are so worried about it. That is why I feel I can relate to the concerns of western farmers. Times are very hard, and farmers are looking more and more for new ways to market their products in order to earn a good living from their hard work.

Young farmers are pooling their resources more and more, in order to survive in the current economic climate. My riding has a number of farming co-operatives and more are being set up every day, because everything is very expensive and because individual farmers cannot survive right now. Prairie farmers have a long history of uniting in order to prosper, which is why the board was created in the first place. This is the legacy that the Conservatives want to consign to oblivion, at the expense of western Canadian farmers.

It is clear that the Conservatives are using Bill C-18 to try to destroy family farms. There is no other foreseeable outcome from this decision they are making with no regard for the clearly expressed opinion of the farmers.

The Conservatives' dogmatism and ideological stubbornness are undeniable. They are going to completely ignore the will of western Canadian farmers and shove their own interests down the farmers' throats. This government has long been looking to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board at all costs, regardless of what anyone here might say. Are the Conservatives bending to pressure from big American corporations, as they often do? It would not be surprising; it is practically a tradition for them. We are concerned about the reasons behind the decision they are making today.

Since the beginning of this debate, the NDP has been saying that any decision on the future of the board has to be made by farmers for farmers. That is part of the act governing the Canadian Wheat Board. The members opposite seem to have forgotten about that detail. We keep reminding them, but to no avail. Let us hope that this time, my voice, added to the others, will have an effect.

The majority of the farmers want to keep this single desk system, and that is what the NDP is asking the Conservatives to do today. The government has to stop being so stubborn and start respecting the will of the farmers. This government has to stop gambling with the prairie economy and withdraw Bill C-18.

• (1555)

[English]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier today I pointed out that it is important for members of the House to be sure that they are presenting factual information. It is quite obvious that this member did not take heed of that admonition, because in her intervention she made a number of comments that are totally inaccurate.

She said that we are dismantling the Wheat Board, that it will be unfortunate for farmers without the Wheat Board, that we are doing away with the Wheat Board, that we are doing away with the

collective approach and that we are consigning the Wheat Board to oblivion. In fact, her colleagues earlier today used similar rhetoric. They said that we are abolishing the Wheat Board, that we are ending the Wheat Board, that the Wheat Board will be gone, that we are destroying the Canadian Wheat Board.

Numerous times today, and indeed prior to today, members on this side of the House have tried to bring the truth to the table. The truth is that we are not ending the Wheat Board; we are simply giving western Canadian farmers the right to market their grain freely. The Wheat Board can continue to exist. We believe, on this side of the House, that Canadian farmers deserve that freedom.

Why would she and her party be opposed to giving farmers the freedom to market their produce freely?

[Translation]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Mr. Speaker, what I have gathered from the debate is that the Conservatives want farmers to be able to live freely in poverty. Eliminating the Canadian Wheat Board's single desk has the same impact as completely dismantling the Wheat Board. Producers will not have the same power on international markets to negotiate and to sell their wheat and barley at the best price. I thank my colleague for providing the opportunity to clarify once more the government's true agenda.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the government is being very disrespectful to the farmers. A member stands up and says, "Well, we are not killing the Wheat Board." The government will have to respect me for not listening to what it is saying, as opposed to listening to what over 20,000 prairie grain farmers are saying today, which is that they want the Canadian Wheat Board.

No matter how often the minister stands up and says that the government is not killing the Wheat Board, the prairie farmers have spoken very clearly through a plebiscite. Over 20,000 say that the government is killing the Canadian Wheat Board.

My question to the member is this: does she believe the 20,000-plus farmers who are saying it means the demise of the Wheat Board if the bill passes, or does she believe a member of the Conservative Party who, in trying to defend the government, continues to stand up and say that the government is not killing the Wheat Board? Who does the member believe?

[Translation]

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his very pertinent comments about this matter and for his straightforward question. I believe that the voice of farmers is louder than that of certain Conservative members, who are here to defend their own interests and not those of the people at the Canadian Wheat Board.

I believe the Canadians who have spoken to my colleagues throughout the country and various organizations and institutions that are asking that the Canadian Wheat Board not be dismantled.

The Deputy Speaker: The member for Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher for a very short question.

Business of Supply

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will be brief. I would like to ask my colleague what she would call a government that does not obey the law and that does not respect a valid plebiscite such as the one conducted.

Ms. Élaine Michaud: Madam Speaker, as there is very little time, I will give a short answer: the Conservative government.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Winnipeg North.

The motion that is before the House today is:

That, in the opinion of the House, farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards; and recognizing this right, the House calls on the government to set aside its legislation abolishing the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) single desk and to conduct a full and free vote by all current members of the CWB to determine their wishes, and calls on the government to agree to honour the outcome of that democratic process.

How could anyone in the House oppose that motion? The motion gives voice to western Canadian farmers, in a balanced way, to have their say on their marketing institution for the crops that they want to market.

I begin from the point of supporting the motion. Western grain producers and, I believe, our supply-managed commodity groups are at risk from the government. On the issue of whether western farmers have a right to vote in an honest plebiscite to determine the future of the Canadian Wheat Board, section 47.1 of the Canadian Wheat Board Act provides for such a vote. In fact, the Wheat Board held a vote on its own, with 62% support, but the government is failing to abide by that section that is in the law of Canada. In my view, it is violating the law.

The only reason such a vote has not been held is that the government knows it would lose the vote, so rather than being defeated by western grain farmers, the government simply refuses to allow them the right to vote at all. In fact, the Wheat Board's greatest critic, and this is ironic—crazy, actually—is the Parliamentary Secretary Responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, who through his whole career as Parliamentary Secretary Responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board has provided misinformation. In fact, in his own riding, the farmer-elected director who won in that riding is pro-single desk and is against the parliamentary secretary's using his MP's office and his office as parliamentary secretary to propagandize against the particular director who won the election.

The legislation to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board single desk is now before a committee. The question the Conservatives have yet to answer is whether they will allow the committee to travel. If they will not allow farmers to vote, then will they at least allow farmers to have a voice and allow them to speak to the committee in western Canada?

The Minister of Agriculture has told the House that the spring election was a mandate to basically destroy the single desk. That is not true. That is wrong. The law of the land says it clearly, and farmers who voted in the election knew the law of the land. They felt they were going to have the right to vote and determine their own destiny on this specific issue. They may have supported the government on gun control and other issues, and I expect they did, but in western Canada they did not vote for one single issue, the

Wheat Board. The law of the land at the time of the election stated in section 47.1 that they would be given the right to vote on their own destiny, and the government is ignoring that law.

During the election, the Minister of Agriculture told an audience in Minnedosa, Manitoba, “Until farmers make that change”—i.e., to vote for the removal of the single desk—“I’m not prepared to work arbitrarily. They are absolutely right to believe in democracy. I do, too.”

What was the minister doing? If he is not having a vote, then he obviously was not telling the truth.

• (1600)

That said, the government is deliberately betraying western grain producers in not allowing them a say in determining their own marketing institution.

I have heard the minister, his parliamentary secretary and others stand up in the House and say that the Canadian Wheat Board was brought in the way it is in 1943 and has not changed since. That is absolutely wrong. The board was changed in 1997 under an act of Parliament. It was designed at the time to give producers control, meaning that they would elect 10 directors and five would be appointed by the government. In other words, farmers in western Canada who market their grain would be able to determine their own destiny, run the Canadian Wheat Board and make the changes necessary, and there have been all kinds of changes over the last number of years exercised by those farmers.

Bill C-18, if passed, would do away with the elected directors of the Canadian Wheat Board. The fate and control of the board would be turned over to the five appointed government hats that the Conservative Party has put in place to do their bidding and destroy the farmers' grain marketing organization from within.

Let us look at the people the government would fire.

There is Stewart Wells. He is an organic farmer from Swift Current, Saskatchewan. He holds a Bachelor of Agricultural Engineering from the University of Saskatchewan, has served eight years as president of the National Farmers Union and is a Saskatchewan Wheat Pool delegate. He would be gone.

There is Cam Goff. He is an owner-operator of a 5,000-acre grain farm and agriculture supply business near Hanley, Saskatchewan. He would be gone.

There is Bill Woods. He is one of the founding members of West Central Road and Rail, a large producer car loading facility that has provided innovative grain marketing options for producers throughout western Saskatchewan. He is also a leading advocate for grain shippers' rights. He would be gone.

Business of Supply

There is John Sandborn, owner and operator of a 3,300-acre grain farm near Benito, Manitoba. John holds a certificate in management leadership from the University of Calgary and a Bachelor of Science from Brandon University. John was a founding director of the Parkland Crop Diversification Foundation and a district representative for Keystone Agricultural Producers of Manitoba. He is a former director of Manitoba Pool Elevators and Agricore Co-operative Ltd. He would be gone.

There is Bill Toews, owner and operator of a large grain and oilseed and specialty crop farm west of Kane, Manitoba. He has international development experience. He is a former director of Keystone Agriculture Producers. He served with the Manitoba Farm Products Marketing Council and the Prairie Region Recommending Committee for Grains subcommittee. He has a degree in agriculture and a post-graduate degree in soil science. He would be gone.

These are not small, outdated, out-of-touch producers who are afraid of marketing on their own; they are the best and brightest, elected by their peers to represent their interests on the only grain marketing entity that still belongs to farmers.

What would Bill C-18 do? It would turf them. They would leave the Canadian Wheat Board in spite of the fact that it is the farmers' grain and it is the farmers who would still be paying every last cent of the Canadian Wheat Board costs. This would leave the board in the hands of unelected government representatives with huge ties to the private grains trade, the very companies that stand to gain from the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board.

The bottom line here is that these producers were elected by their peers. They are not outdated producers. They are good producers who made the changes that producers asked for. Producers voted 62% in favour of maintaining that single desk selling agency. Eight out of ten of those directors are pro-single desk sellers. With the government's representation in the bill, without giving farmers a voice to have their say in the marketing institution, they would all be fired. Left in their place would be five directors appointed by the government.

Why are we seeing this in a democracy? Is the government's ideology just to ignore the facts and disallow the right of primary producers to have a say in their own destiny and the specific institution that they want to market their grain?

•(1605)

How can anybody, and especially those backbenchers in the governing party, sit there and allow themselves to be run by the top? How can they sit there and not support this motion by the member for Churchill?

•(1610)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Madam Speaker, I have been sitting here today trying to figure out why those members opposite are taking the position they are on the Wheat Board. It is really difficult. I am not going to impugn motive, because I do not know the motive, but I am guessing. That is all I can do, and I have come to the conclusion that the most likely reason has to be that they want to continue to impose on western farmers something they do not want for their own farmers.

The member for Malpeque in Prince Edward Island and all members of the NDP have spoken to this motion. They favour maintaining this brutal monopoly for western farmers, but the motion does not ask for it to be put in place for farmers in Quebec, Ontario and Atlantic Canada. Why have they not done that? The only reason I can think of is that it is because they want an unfair competitive advantage for their constituents over constituents of mine and others in the Wheat Board area.

Why should the Wheat Board monopoly only be maintained for farmers in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta? It just does not make any sense. I would like those members to put an amendment to the motion that would impose this monopoly on their farmers as well.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Madam Speaker, I would love to answer the question.

The "brutal monopoly", as the member calls it, is really the marketing system that in every study over the last 20 years has been shown to maximize returns back to primary producers far better than the open market does.

I read the member's remarks in the House. He talked about his grandfather, who was a grain producer, and how times were tough. He needed cash in the fall, but he was not allowed to sell because of the Canadian Wheat Board. That was true at the time. His point on the record was that his grandfather had to sell at a lower price in order to get rid of his grain.

Two things have happened since. First, the Liberal government of the 1970s put in place an advance payment program to allow producers to hold their grain so that they do not have to sell into a surplus market when they harvest in the fall. Second, the member admitted that his grandfather had to sell at a lower price. That is what will happen with the loss of the Canadian Wheat Board single desk: the lowest seller will set the price, in contrast to maximizing returns through market intelligence, as is done now through the Canadian Wheat Board single desk.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will again ask the member what he would call a government that does not respect the law or a valid plebiscite, such as the one already conducted.

[English]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Simply put, Madam Speaker, it would be called a dictatorship. What we have in this country is an absolute executive dictatorship. I cannot understand government backbenchers, who are not the government. They think they are, but the government is the executive council of cabinet. They are members of the governing party, but they take their orders and hide.

The fact of the matter is that if the Conservative government is serious about giving grain farmers marketing freedom, it would extend to them the same right that producers have in every other sector of the agricultural industry, as well as society as a whole: the right to organize themselves into a bargaining unit with the negotiating clout to advance their economic interests.

Business of Supply

That is all farmers are asking for. That is all we are asking for. We are asking the government to allow the vote that is specifically stated in section 47.1 so that if farmers wanted to organize themselves into a marketing unit to maximize their returns in the international marketplace, they could do it.

It is unbelievable. The Minister of Agriculture has never done a tour of the Canadian Wheat Board, other than to drop in once for about 15 minutes to see its marketing intelligence, its war room, and how it gains those returns back to producers from the international market.

• (1615)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the Canadian Wheat Board has served the prairie farmer for over six decades now. All in all, we would find overwhelming support for that Wheat Board over that period of time.

The Canadian Wheat Board has been highly successful at garnering a wonderful brand that ultimately has allowed it to get into markets and to maximize markets because countries from around the world recognize the Canadian Wheat Board and its efforts, and the way in which it has played such a strong role, in terms of feeding the world, and that food comes from our Prairies.

I look at what the government would actually do by the bill that it is pushing through the House of Commons. What the government would really do is destroy family farms. What it would really do is hurt rural communities.

We look to the government to table, to provide any information, any credible information, any studies that it has conducted, that would clearly show that the actions that it is taking are for the betterment of the prairie farmers.

The government members have stood up time and time again to say they believe that this is all about freedom and that this is something that has to be done in order to achieve freedom. That is the only argument that I see the government bringing forward to date on this issue. I have not seen any documents demonstrating how the rural community would prosper and how our wheat producers would prosper in any tangible way.

Instead, what I witnessed is a Prime Minister who has a personal agenda, and that personal agenda can be dated back to before he was even the prime minister or leader of the Reform Party or the Conservative Party of today. For some odd reason, the Prime Minister has had it in for the Canadian Wheat Board for so many years. Because he now has a majority government, he believes he has a mandate, the mandate may be in his own mind, to override what the prairie farmer really and truly wants.

The prairie farmer wants to retain the Wheat Board. We know that because there was a plebiscite. Even though there was a moral and legal obligation for the Prime Minister to conduct a plebiscite, he chose not to. The reason he chose not to conduct a plebiscite was because the Prime Minister had a very good sense, based on experience, that he would not be able to win the plebiscite. He felt that by not conducting a plebiscite that the Conservatives would be able to get away with killing the Wheat Board as we know it today.

A plebiscite was conducted, not by the government, by a third party, sponsored through the Wheat Board. It saw how important it was to have the plebiscite. Over 20,000 grain producers, farmers, who live in Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta, sent a very strong message, over 60%, that the Canadian Wheat Board was something of great value and we needed to retain it.

Now, we have the government somehow believing that it still has the mandate. If it were to still believe that it has a legitimate mandate, I would suggest it do what the law prescribes and conduct the plebiscite.

However, I do not believe for a moment that the government is going to do that because it is not about facts. It has nothing to do with what is in the best interests of prairie farmers. It has everything to do with this personal hatred that our current Prime Minister has for the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1620)

I want to quote the *Globe and Mail* from October 17. I made reference to this the other day.

Prime Minister—

Fill in the blank with today's Prime Minister's name.

—has a message for all the critics of his government's plan to end the monopoly of the Canadian Wheat Board: Get over it.

It goes on:

It's time for the wheat board and others who have been standing in the way to realize that this train is barreling down a prairie track... You're much better to get on it than to lie on the tracks because this is going ahead.

Some 20,000 farmers disagree. The Prime Minister is asking those 20,000-plus farmers to get on the track. I find that highly disrespectful. I have never witnessed something of that nature in my 20-plus years of being involved in the parliamentary process.

I would suggest that there are some things that the Prime Minister could do to try to redeem himself to the prairie farmer. The first thing he could do is to agree to hold the plebiscite, recognize the value of a plebiscite, and then respect the wishes of the plebiscite. The Liberal Party of Canada will respect the plebiscite. We will listen to what our prairie farmers are saying.

We have had member after member of the Conservative Party stand up and say that they went home over the weekend and had all this wonderful support for what they are doing, and that we should continue to move forward. I, too, live in the west, and over the weekend I met with prairie farmers who indicated that this is a bad thing and it needs to be stopped.

There are many more prairie farmers agreeing with the farmers I met with than there are who agree with members from the other side of this House.

Earlier today in question period I asked why prairie farmers were not being allowed to voice their concerns to a committee of this House. Instead of a committee of this House dealing with this bill here in the Ottawa bubble, why do we not allow that committee to go to Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta? It could listen to what prairie farmers actually have to say about this bill.

Business of Supply

I have been in legislative forums before where we have committees. We were open and invited public participation. Why not allow that? Why not afford those prairie farmers, the ones the government claims to want to represent, the ones the government says are supporting them, the opportunity to come before a committee? They should not have to fly to Ottawa.

The committee should get out of the Ottawa bubble, go to the prairie provinces, and afford those wheat producers the opportunity to say whether they like what the government is doing or they do not like what the government is doing.

What is the government afraid? I suspect that if we do not do it, it will be for the same reason the government does not support a plebiscite because it believes it will not win. I suspect the government knows full well that if a committee went to the Prairies, a vast majority of those making presentations would be saying, "Please, do not do this. The Wheat Board is too important to the Prairies. It is too important to our prairie producers. It is too important for our rural communities".

I would like to invite members of the government caucus to participate this Friday, October 28, in a rally of farmers in Winnipeg. There is a day of activities. If any of them would like to participate and do not have the agenda, I would be more than happy to provide it to them. I am sure they will be afforded the opportunity to address our farmers and others.

• (1625)

As much as I talk about prairie farmers, there are many concerned people who live on the Prairies today that recognize the value of the CWB and I appeal to the government to do likewise, recognize the value of the Canadian Wheat Board and the wonderful things it has done for us.

[Translation]

Ms. Ève Péclét (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Madam Speaker, to add insult to injury, all the members are laughing and no one is listening to what my colleague is saying. That shows a complete lack of respect. They are making jokes and laughing about the fact that he is standing up for his constituents. That really shows a total lack of respect. It shows just how little the Conservative government cares about the interests of Canadians right now.

I will get back to the question I have for my colleague from Winnipeg North. We saw what happened in the United States. One, two or three major companies have a monopoly over wheat. I can name a number of documentaries that show interviews with American farmers. They lost their homes and their families because they had no more money. They had to shut down their business.

I would like my friend to tell us how the government can justify the free market. Is it truly free to be at the mercy of huge American companies? Is that what the free market is about?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for the concern that she expresses in regard to this important issue. We do need to recognize that the bill would kill many family farms. It would put farmers in positions in which they are going to have to look for alternatives and in many cases it will mean getting out of the farming community.

That is why news agencies like *The Economist* have said that we are going to see rural communities hurt because farmers and their disposable income contribute to the well-being of many rural communities in many different ways. The long-term impact of the bill's passage will be to the detriment for our rural communities and many wheat producers.

Mr. Ray Boughey (Palliser, CPC): Madam Speaker, there are so many holes in the argument from the other side of the House it is hard to decide where to start. Hon. members of the opposition and the third party seem to have lost the fact that everything that is being proposed by the government is already in place.

Farm folks for a number of years have marketed their own pulses, flax, canola and oats. Marketing of wheat and barley is another grain that they market. I do not know why suddenly we are going to see everything fall apart in a hand basket. It just does not make sense. If this operation is so good, from what I have heard from the other side of the House, the Canadian Wheat Board should be across Canada.

When will members opposite propose that the Canadian Wheat Board take over all grain across Canada?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Madam Speaker, that is a pretty decent idea in one sense and if farmers across Canada were in favour of doing something of that nature, I would be open to it.

For some peculiar reason, the Conservative member does not have confidence in the prairie producer. If he respected the intelligence and the ability for prairie grain producers to make decisions, he would respect the plebiscite that was conducted. These are individuals who have the experience. They work on farms. They have been in the industry for many years and the wheat farmers have sent a very clear message to the government. We cannot just say I am one person, but I am listening to what the wheat farmers are saying. I do not understand why the member does not listen to what the wheat farmers are saying and support the Wheat Board.

• (1630)

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Saint-Jean, Flooding in Montérégie; the hon. member for Halifax, The Environment; the hon. member for Charlottetown, Veterans.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Robert Chisholm (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to split my time with my colleague, the member for Drummond.

I rise today to speak in support of the motion from my colleague, the member for Churchill, which is calling upon the government to acknowledge the fact that farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards. It also calls upon the government to conduct a full and free vote of current members of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Business of Supply

While listening to the debate I was struck by the fact that government members believe they know what is best and that they have the answers. The Canadian Wheat Board is an organization that has existed for some 60 years. It was set up by farmers for farmers and decisions are made by farmers for the benefit of farmers, yet without consulting farmers the government is making a decision as to whether or not it will exist. It is completely undercutting the right and responsibility afforded to farmers in the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

The government members have made claims as to why they are allowed to do that. They claim that because the majority of farmers voted for them in the May 2 election they can do whatever they want. Another claim is that the Wheat Board was one of the items in their election platform.

There were a number of items in the Conservatives' platform. Many people voted for the Conservatives for a whole host of reasons, not necessarily because they agreed with one particular item. To suggest that everyone who voted for the Conservatives supported every one of those policies is a complete misrepresentation of the democratic process and is irresponsible in the extreme.

A plebiscite was held in September wherein farmers had the opportunity to indicate how they felt about the government's decision. The result was that 62% of farmers clearly indicated they felt the Wheat Board should continue. If they have determined that is the best way to go forward, why would the government reject that?

I know that perhaps eight, ten or a dozen or more members opposite will be directly affected by this decision. I do not know why they think they know it all and believe that the some 20,000 farmers who voted to keep the Wheat Board are wrong. Obviously, those eight, ten, twelve or so farmers who are sitting on the government benches believe they would be affected positively by this decision and feel that they have all the answers.

There is another question that I had thought of recently which others have mentioned. That is the question of supply, both for exports and for imports, which relates to the transportation network. I am the international trade critic for the opposition and one of the issues we have with regard to transportation in Canada is our ability to move goods in a timely and orderly fashion to our ports for export purposes or transporting imported goods to markets. There are serious concerns as to how that is handled.

• (1635)

One issue we will be talking about in the House at some point relates to who is in control of the rail system and whether that has been in the best interests of industry, of Canada and of Canadians. We will examine that more clearly.

In the event that the Canadian Wheat Board is dismantled, the marketing, sale and transportation of these products will either fall to the corporate sector or, as some people have suggested, to private interests. However, others believe that before long the control of the marketing and sale of these products will end up in the hands of Cargill, one of the world's largest wheat buyers and marketers. That would pose a problem for farmers. That is one reason they have largely voted against the dismantling of the Canadian Wheat Board.

We already have problems negotiating trade deals with other countries concerning how we can do a better job internally with the transportation of goods either to markets or from our ports into our cities.

Those are a few of my concerns with respect to transportation.

I now come back to the fact that I am struck by the lack of democratic respect the government has shown toward farmers by taking it upon itself, with the stroke of a pen, to dismantle an organization that has existed for so long and has been such an important tradition.

Farmers continue to come together to make decisions regarding how their grain will be marketed, how it will be sold and how it will be transported. That right will be taken away from them.

The members opposite suggest that farmers need freedom. Farmers have freedom. They can vote on whether or not this is in their best interests. That is why the legislation that was put in place to set up and manage the Wheat Board was constructed as it was.

If in their wisdom farmers decide that it is not in their best interests to keep the Wheat Board, they will make that decision. That is laid out clearly in the bylaws pertaining to the Canadian Wheat Board. However, they have not made that decision. Rather, they have decided that they want the Canadian Wheat Board to remain in place and to continue representing their interests, which it has done for so many years now.

Government members, who are seemingly fearful of the democratic process, thump their chests and say they know best. They claim that because farmers voted for them on May 2 they have the authority to do this, yet they have not presented any evidence, impact studies or reports to the House to back up their claim that this will be in the best interests of farmers. They simply say that this is what they will do.

NDP members and other members, including those in the third party, have spoken eloquently with regard to the history of the Canadian Wheat Board and the right of farmers to make this decision on their own. That is what this motion is about. It simply reiterates what is contained in the legislation and in the bylaws pertaining to the Canadian Wheat Board. It allows farmers who are members of the Canadian Wheat Board to make a decision. It provides for a fair and a full vote to be conducted by members of the Canadian Wheat Board that we are to live by and respect. Yet the government looks at us and says, "Why would we do that? We know best".

• (1640)

From my experience in politics and otherwise, I suggest that the people most directly affected are the ones who know best. That is why I am supporting this motion. It is why I urge members opposite to come to the realization that maybe they do not know what is best, and in this case they should allow farmers to make that decision.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member has been the leader of a provincial party. He mentioned that he is concerned about the lack of democratic respect.

Based on his experience, I know he would think there should also be some fiscal and financial responsibility in doing a net benefit analysis in terms of government making decisions.

Business of Supply

In a previous court action when the government was trying to bring in Bill C-46 the Wheat Board took the government to court. The director general of marketing policy for Agriculture Canada testified under oath before the Federal Court of Canada with respect to whether the federal government had undertaken a specific economic impact analysis in relation at that time to proposed regulatory changes to the Canadian Wheat Board. Legal counsel asked him this: "Do I have your answer that as far as you are aware, nobody within government has done any analysis of the kind I have described to you?" He means a net benefit economic analysis. The answer: "No, I am not aware that anyone in the government who has done."

That is Federal Court transcript testimony of Mr. Paul Martin, director general of marketing policy for Agriculture Canada on July 16, 2007.

In terms of a corporation, the magnitude of \$5.6 billion a year controlled by an elected board of directors, does the member think it is irresponsible to go ahead without an economic net benefit analysis?

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Madam Speaker, there is no doubt that it is the height of fiscal irresponsibility for the government to be making a decision with this kind of impact without having determined the costs.

That member knows, as I do, we are watching negotiations with Europe regarding the CETA, where we have on the table the possibility that the government could extend patent protection to pharmaceuticals which could add \$2.9 billion in costs to the health care system in Canada and it has not done one lick of study to determine whether that will happen. That is the level of irresponsibility the government continues to show Canadians.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have a very simple question. How does my colleague define a government that does not respect a valid plebiscite and a valid consultation and which breaks the law?

• (1645)

Mr. Robert Chisholm: Madam Speaker, I call a government that ignores the democratic rights of farmers, that makes decisions with this kind of economic impact without due consideration of the impact on taxpayers, that flouts the law, completely out of touch. I call that government completely out of touch with the responsibilities accorded to it by the rights instilled in this Parliament to be respectful of the people of Canada, to be respectful of this institution, and to make sure government members conduct themselves in a responsible and mature manner in the best interests of all Canadians.

The government has shown again that it is completely out of touch and is running recklessly forward without any consideration for what it is doing to the fabric of this country.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would first like to thank the member for Churchill for proposing this motion, which is truly very important. It is a brilliant response to the Conservatives' mistake, namely, Bill C-18, which proposes dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board.

Members may find it strange that, as the member for Drummond, I am rising in the House to support this motion, which seeks to recognize western farmers' legitimate, democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards.

Nevertheless, it is not so strange, since a large part of the riding of Drummond is made up of rural farmland. There are many farmers in my region, whether they be dairy, cattle, pork and poultry producers or grain farmers.

In this regard, I recently had the privilege of meeting with dairy farmer representatives when I was in my riding. They told me that they are in regular contact with farmers in other provinces and that they are very concerned to see the heavy-handed approach that the Conservatives are taking in forcing western farmers to give up a tool that they feel is essential to getting a fair and profitable price, particularly in the case of smaller farms, which are often family-owned.

The single desk marketing system for wheat, durum and barley is an institution that has been very successful and is an essential component of the prairie economy. It is the largest and most successful grain marketing organization in the world. The Canadian Wheat Board was created in the 1920s, when farmers in western Canada started to join together to market their grain in order to get the best price for their crops. Then, in 1943, a single desk system was created, which required all prairie farmers to sell their wheat through the board. The single desk structure provided financial stability, prudent risk management and certainty of grain supply. These are good reasons to support this motion. They show the importance of the Canadian Wheat Board. These things were extremely positive for marketing in the interests of farmers. Today, they provide an undeniable advantage for western farmers.

The Conservatives should acknowledge this. Even though the government's decision to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board will have a very serious impact on the lives of farmers, the decision was made without any analysis of how it would affect them. It goes against what they said they want. Indeed, on September 12, 2011, 62% of farmers voted to maintain the Canadian Wheat Board. That is incredible. That is a very decisive result. That means they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. Where were the Conservatives when those results were released? Did they not read the news like everyone else?

Allen Orberg, a farmer and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board's board of directors, thinks that this government does not have a plan. In his opinion, the government has done no analysis and its approach is based solely on its blind commitment to marketing freedom. I will come back to marketing freedom a little later. He added that the government's reckless approach will throw Canada's grain industry into disarray, jeopardize the future of a \$5 billion a year export sector and take money out of the pockets of Canadian farmers. What upsets me the most about this is that it all goes against Canadian farmers and only benefits large multinational corporations.

Business of Supply

Who will benefit from this bill? That is the question I keep asking myself. Who will benefit from dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board? Dismantling it will unfortunately not benefit farmers, but it will benefit multinationals and people who will get rich on the backs of farmers and family farms.

•(1650)

Why are the Conservatives so set on dismantling the Canadian Wheat Board when prairie farmers have voiced their opposition? This survey clearly shows that the Conservatives are doing a great disservice to western farmers.

By way of comparison, let us look at what happened in Australia after a board similar to the Canadian Wheat Board was dismantled. Before the Australian Wheat Board was dismantled, Australian wheat could command \$99 per tonne over American wheat. After the Australian Wheat Board was dismantled, things went awry. In fact, in December 2008, the price of Australian wheat dropped to \$27 per tonne below U.S. wheat. In just three years, the 40,000 farmers who were members of the Australian Wheat Board all became customers of Cargill, a multinational and one of the world's largest privately owned agribusiness corporations. And where, Madam Speaker, do you think this company is based? In the United States. What are the chances? Is that what we want here in Canada, to give our agriculture to the United States, to big multinationals? I hope not.

Once again, it seems as though this government is clearing the way for large American corporations to the economic disadvantage of its own people and voters. Once again, the Conservatives are putting the interests of the private sector ahead of the public interest of Canadians. And that disappoints me.

The people in my riding of Drummond are also worried. All of the farmers are worried about the current Conservative policies. They are wondering what the Conservatives have up their sleeves. First, it is the Canadian Wheat Board. What is next? In Drummondville, in the riding of Drummond, many people, including dairy and egg producers, depend on supply management. Right now this market is protected by supply management and producers make a good enough living. There are many farms in the riding of Drummond and they rely heavily on supply management; it is very important in my riding. People in my riding, farmers included, often come to ask me what is happening, where all this is going to lead, what will come of it and what the Conservatives are planning. First it is the Canadian Wheat Board, then what? Supply management?

As members know, supply management is being challenged in connection with the free trade agreement with the European Union. My constituents, representatives of dairy producers, came to see me to say that we must defend supply management, that it must be maintained in Quebec and the riding of Drummond, that it was essential and that I had to fight for it. I promised them that I would do so. We are talking about the Canadian Wheat Board now, and it is a similar topic. This is an opportunity for us to stand up for western Canadians.

In conclusion, the Conservatives often talk about freedom. They want to give prairie farmers the freedom they want so badly. They are in favour of the free market, of giving freedom to the poor farmers. I agree with them. We should give the farmers their

freedom, but we should give them the freedom to choose and not shove the Conservatives' choice down their throats. That is not freedom. Freedom is giving them the choice. There was already a survey of 38,261 farmers, and 62% of them voted in favour of maintaining the Canadian Wheat Board.

•(1655)

Therefore, I urge the Conservatives to support this excellent motion by the member for Churchill and to let the farmers determine their own future.

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Madam Speaker, the opposition member spoke about scrapping the Wheat Board, but that is not what is happening. This is about giving farmers the freedom to market their produce.

I wonder how many of that member's farmers have told him that they want the monopoly back in Quebec. I would suspect none.

Farmers in my riding of Lambton—Kent—Middlesex in Ontario are happy that we got rid of the single desk. Now they have the opportunity to market their own produce.

The member talked about the importance of supply management. I guess he does not understand that there is absolutely no link. On the other hand, we are the only party that talked about supply management in the election. His party never even stood up for it.

I wonder if the farmers in Quebec are interested in going back to the monopoly and the single desk seller. I would appreciate the member's comments.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. In fact, what I am asking him and what everyone in the House is asking him is to respect western Canadian farmers. He spoke of giving them freedom. Indeed, let us give them the freedom to choose and let us hold a plebiscite. We already have a poll that clearly shows that the farmers want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board. If he believes that is not true, then let him show his democratic side and support the excellent motion moved by the hon. member for Churchill. It is a fair and balanced motion that shows a democratic vision by asking the farmers their opinion.

[English]

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for reminding members of the House what we are debating here. New Democrats are not calling for farmers to decide. The law requires it and farmers are asking that their vote be honoured.

I want to share with the member a news release issued today by the Canadian Wheat Board Alliance saying that it hopes all members of Parliament will support this motion to give back its democratic rights. This is really about basic democratic principles. The people affected by decisions should have a democratic say in those decisions, and that is what this motion recognizes.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her excellent question and for reading this news release, which does not surprise me at all. When I met with dairy farmers and dairy farming representatives, as well as people from the UPA, they told me they were in regular contact with farmers across Canada, who told the dairy farmers that the Canadian Wheat Board was an essential and effective tool that guaranteed them a good salary and good working conditions. I hope the Conservatives will allow the farmers to democratically choose what they want. Do they want to keep the Canadian Wheat Board monopoly? I believe they do. The plebiscite shows that 62% want to keep the board. Now, if the government has any doubt, let it hold a plebiscite, as the motion calls for.

•(1700)

[English]

Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this motion, so I can speak against the motion.

The words in the motion seem to be about standing up for the democratic rights of western wheat and barley farmers, but the absence of a single, but important, word reveals the real intent of the members of Parliament who support this motion. That word is “each”. The motion currently reads “...farmers have a democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards...”.

However to properly and fully reflect the actual inalienable rights of those concerned, it should say “...each farmer has the democratic right to determine the future of their own supply management tools and marketing boards”.

This change captures the essence of this debate and reveals the essence of the opposition's objection to the marketing freedom for grain farmers act. The official opposition party is a self-proclaimed socialist party, and as socialists, they will promote government-enforced collectivism. We Conservatives have no problem with co-operation or co-operative organizations. In fact, we know co-operation works. However, we also recognize that the participants of any co-operative effort must be voluntary participants. Otherwise it is not co-operation; it becomes coercion. We can talk all day long about democratic rights, but if we do not include individual rights we are not talking about the democratic rights I am fighting for.

Yesterday in the House, a Liberal member referred to the correct principle that when we deny the rights of one we threaten the rights of all. However, he went on to distort this principle to defend the government-enforced elimination of the rights of not just one but many prairie farmers.

The marketing freedom for grain farmers act does nothing to remove the rights of farmers who wish to continue to use the co-operative tools provided by the Canadian Wheat Board, but at the same time it restores the rights of those farmers who want to market their grain as they see fit. It restores the equality of all farmers across the country by giving western farmers the same freedom already enjoyed by eastern farmers and British Columbia farmers.

Business of Supply

For the benefit of anyone who is not convinced that this motion is about the NDP belief that westerners are not fit to govern themselves, let me remind them of the incredible and outrageous assertion made by an NDP member who is a city slicker from Winnipeg, that members of Parliament who happen to be western grain farmers should preclude themselves from debate about the Wheat Board and preclude themselves from voting on the act. He claims they are in a conflict of interest because they believe western farmers will benefit by the act.

Give me a break. Every bill we pass in the House should be for the benefit of all Canadians.

Let me quote part of the prayer that is spoken by the Speaker at the beginning of Parliament every day. It says:

Grant us wisdom, knowledge, and understanding to preserve the blessings of this country for the benefit of all....

The MPs who he says are in conflict of interest would only be in a conflict of interest if the bill were designed specifically to benefit them, or them and a small group, to the exclusion of others.

He says they cannot have things both ways, but if we are to apply his lack of logic to every situation, and if we believe in the principles cited in the parliamentary prayer, then all MPs should preclude themselves from all debate.

Our democracy is founded on the idea that we elect representatives from among us to represent us and our interests. We call this the House of Commons because it is supposed to be filled by the common man. The MPs who are western farmers were sent here by western farmers and they sent them largely because they are western farmers. They sent them knowing full well they were committed to freeing up the Wheat Board, because the majority of western farmers believe it should be free. Even those who want to use the Wheat Board believe it should be free.

Why would western farmers want other western farmers to represent them in the House of Commons? It is precisely because they would be motivated to pass laws that are good for western farmers and because they are far more likely to know what is good for western farmers than a city slicker from Winnipeg.

•(1705)

Furthermore it is a fallacy that this issue only impacts western farmers. Agriculture affects us all. In addition to providing our food, agriculture is the backbone of any economy. We can live without oil and we can even live without shelter, but we cannot live without food.

Just as important, as we were reminded by my Liberal friend yesterday, to limit the rights of one is to threaten the rights of us all. To continue to allow the government, through the Canadian Wheat Board, to limit the freedom of western farmers puts at risk all freedoms of all Canadians.

Business of Supply

Perhaps the New Democrat from Winnipeg should insist that I preclude myself from this debate, even though I am not a farmer, because I believe that by defending the rights of each and every farmer, I am defending my own rights, the rights of my family and the rights of my country.

Be under no illusion that the member from Winnipeg is a radical fringe member. His colleagues loudly applaud every time he brings this stuff up. It is a fundamental doctrine of NDP ideology that big brother should be in charge, that the people as individuals are not fit to govern themselves.

By now most western Canadian farmers have finished harvesting what is reported to be a high-quality wheat and barley crop that will feed the world. They have managed that crop every step of the way. They have seeded it, sprayed it, fertilized it and harvested it, and we believe those farmers are capable of marketing those crops. They do not need anybody from downtown anywhere telling them what to do with their product.

I question not only the words of this motion but the intent of this motion. I do not believe it arises out of a belief that democracy cannot be had in the absence of plebiscites and referendums, for when the NDP members were asked why postal workers were not able to vote on the strike nor the labour negotiations in June, they selectively remembered the correct principle that our democracy allows for the selection of representatives to make decisions on our behalf.

As I mentioned yesterday, when the Liberal government passed legislation allowing same sex marriage without a referendum, it justified this by citing the correct principle that our western democracies are founded upon the principle that the majority cannot impose its views upon the minorities, that individuals have rights that no majority has the right to vote away.

Yet today both the Liberals and the NDP pretend that passing this legislation without a referendum is a travesty of democratic principles. Since they know this is not true, I cannot help but believe there is some other motive. The opposition parties accuse the Conservatives of being motivated by ideology. If they are talking about the ideology of freedom and equality, then I am guilty as charged.

Over the years, the Conservatives have made it very clear that we intend to give marketing choice to western grain farmers. It has been an election promise many times. It was an election promise during the 2011 campaign. While we received support across the country, and overwhelming support in the prairie provinces, especially in the rural ridings where the prairie grain farmers live, we were supported for many reasons, including our commitment to the economy, to a more just justice system and to scrapping the long gun registry.

Rural prairie voters understood full well that by voting Conservative, they were voting to promote a Conservative majority. They knew that a Conservative majority government would put an end to the monopoly held by the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1710)

[*Translation*]

In the June 2011 Speech from the Throne, our government again committed to ensuring that western farmers would have the freedom to sell their wheat and barley on the open market.

[*English*]

That was a throne speech commitment. The marketing freedom for grain farmers act is the fulfillment of years of election promises, the fulfillment of the 2011 election promise, the fulfillment of our commitment in the Speech from the Throne.

We made a promise and we are committed to delivering on that promise. No reasonable person could honestly say that keeping a clear and definite election promise is undemocratic. In fact, every reasonable person knows that a government that is democratically elected, after making election promises, must keep those promises. To allow a small group to vote away the responsibility to keep those promises we made to all voters is to reject our democratic responsibility.

The Liberals and the NDP are willing to contradict the very principles they claim to champion in the hopes of getting the public to believe the opposite. How can parties that claim to be defenders of the little guy, the defenders of minority rights, think it is okay for farmers who want the Wheat Board to force their neighbours who do not want it? We deliver marketing choice to grain farmers, all western grain farmers, each western grain farmer.

The opposition distorts things further and thereby betrays the insincerity of its motives by telling people we are shutting down the Wheat Board. All this legislation does is make participation in the Wheat Board voluntary, thereby transforming it from a coercive organization into a co-operative organization. Farmers who want to use it can. Farmers who do not want to use it do not have to. Even if 99% of the farmers want to use it, they have no right to force the 1% who do not.

If the majority of the farmers really does want the Wheat Board, what need is there to make it a monopoly? It will thrive in the absence of the minority. We must not buy into the fear. We must embrace the future, where producers will be able to manage their business as never before, with transparency of prices and control over to whom they sell, where young farmers will finally have the tools they need to make their farming dreams a reality, where farming entrepreneurs can harness innovation and add value to their crops beyond the farm gate.

The future of our agriculture industry is bright. We want to provide new opportunities in the grain market. We want to extend to all western wheat and barley farmers the democratic property rights upon which our nation was built, the democratic property rights that farmers in eastern Canada have, the democratic property rights that farmers in British Columbia have. The marketing freedom for grain farmers act would give them the rights and opportunities they so richly deserve. It would protect their democratic freedoms.

Private Members' Business

Over the past five years our government has worked hard with farmers to help grow their businesses, drive Canada's economy and leverage our natural advantage of land and resources. We have consulted with farmers. We have consulted with all people who are interested, which goes beyond the farmers.

In conclusion, we hope the members in the House will show their support for western Canadian farmers, the same support that is afforded to all other farmers in Canada by supporting the marketing freedom for grain farmers act. My colleagues in the House can help western Canadian farmers capitalize on this new opportunity.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion.

[*English*]

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

•(1715)

Ms. Chris Charlton: Madam Speaker, I ask that the vote be deferred until tomorrow at the expiry of oral questions.

The Deputy Speaker: The vote is deferred until tomorrow at the end of oral questions.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Madam Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 5:30.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there agreement to see the House at 5:30?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC) moved that Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Madam Speaker, today I am pleased to rise and speak to my private member's bill, Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (trafficking in persons). This bill follows my previous bill, Bill C-268, which created Canada's child trafficking offence with stiff penalties for individuals trafficking a minor in Canada. Having received royal assent on June 29, 2010, Bill C-268 is now law and is being used across Canada, most recently in a case right here in Ottawa.

Bill C-268 was supported by members from multiple parties in the last Parliament. I want to take a moment to thank the members from the Conservative Party, NDP, Liberal Party and Green Party for offering their support for Bill C-310. This bipartisan support reveals that members on both sides of the House are committed to combating human trafficking.

The term "human trafficking" can often be mistaken as human smuggling, which is the illegal movement of people across international borders. However, we must be clear and concise about what human trafficking is during our debate tonight.

Human trafficking is the illegal trade of human beings for sexual exploitation or forced labour or other forms of slavery. Human trafficking is nothing short of modern day slavery. The focus of my bill is on combating the enslavement of individuals both in Canada and abroad.

I would like to begin by speaking to the recent Ottawa case that I referred to a few minutes ago to demonstrate the reality of human trafficking here in Canada. Last week, Montreal police caught up to Jamie Byron, who was charged by the Ottawa police force for a number of serious human trafficking-related offences, including the trafficking of a minor. Mr. Byron, considered to be violent, is also wanted in Toronto for robbery, uttering threats and possession of a dangerous weapon.

I would ask members to take a moment and consider that only a few blocks away from where we are sitting today in the House, Jamie Byron was forcing underage girls into prostitution. The methods he used were particularly heinous. In a downtown Ottawa hotel a young 17-year-old girl trafficked from Windsor, Ontario was starved until she agreed to be a prostitute. This is nothing short of slavery.

As parliamentarians, we must be resolved to eradicating all forms of this slavery, both in Canada and abroad. The first clause in Bill C-310 would amend the Criminal Code to add the current trafficking in persons offences 279.01 and 279.011 to the list of offences which, if committed outside Canada by a Canadian or permanent resident, could be prosecuted in Canada. The very nature of human trafficking requires an international focus.

Canada is known as a source, transit and destination country for human trafficking. The human trafficking offence in section 279.01 states:

Every person who recruits, transports, transfers, receives, holds, conceals or harbours a person...or exercises control, direction or influence over the movements of a person...for the purpose of exploiting them or facilitating their exploitation is guilty of an indictable offence—

Private Members' Business

I would like to provide a basic example of how Bill C-310's amendment to extend extraterritorial jurisdiction to human trafficking offences would apply in an international human trafficking case.

Human trafficking can often have global implications with traffickers recruiting in one country and sending victims to another country. For example, if a Canadian trafficker were to situate him or herself in Romania and recruit, transport, transfer, receive, hold or control victims to be exploited in Canada or even within Romania, the amendment in Bill C-310 would ensure that person could be held criminally responsible in Canada.

However, if the trafficker were to return to Canada today without being caught or apprehended in Romania, the individual would not be guilty of an offence under Canadian law. In a reverse situation, this amendment would also ensure that Canada's trafficking in persons offences would apply to a Canadian who was trafficking Canadian victims within and throughout other countries.

Let us look at a real life example. John Wrenshall is a Canadian serving 25 years in an American prison for running a child brothel in Thailand. He was recruiting, holding and controlling boys as young as four years old and arranging for international child sex tourists to visit his brothel. Mr. Wrenshall even admitted to the court that his brothel was linked to a Thai pedophile sex trafficking ring.

• (1720)

The U.S. arrested Mr. Wrenshall in the U.K., after he left Thailand, for a number of charges, including aiding and abetting Americans to sexually abuse children abroad.

However, had Mr. Wrenshall managed to return to Canada, we would not have been able to prosecute him for human trafficking since Canada's trafficking in persons offences are not extraterritorial.

I also want to note that this amendment would apply to people who traffic victims for sexual exploitation, as well as for forced labour or slavery. This is important, as we know that men, women and children have been recruited abroad and trafficked to Canada for the purposes of forced labour.

Extraterritorial laws are guided by a number of principles under international law. Bill C-310's amendment would fall under the nationality principle that can be defined as "States may assert jurisdiction over acts of their nationals wherever the act might take place."

Canada has designated a number of serious Criminal Code offences as extraterritorial offences, especially those related to the sexual abuse of children by Canadians sex tourists. These can be found in section 7.4 of the Criminal Code.

There are three primary purposes of designating a criminal offence with extraterritorial jurisdiction. I would like to review these with regard to human trafficking.

First, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would allow Canada to arrest Canadians who have left the country where they engage in human trafficking in an attempt to avoid punishment here in Canada.

Second, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would ensure justice in cases where the offence was committed in a country

without strong anti-human trafficking laws or strong judicial systems.

Finally, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would clearly indicate that Canada will not tolerate its own citizens engaging in human trafficking anywhere in the world.

While it would not be conventional to start applying extraterritorial jurisdiction to every Criminal Code offence, there is significant international precedence to do so for human trafficking offences. For example, a number of countries, such as Germany, Cyprus and Cambodia, have applied international jurisdiction to their domestic human trafficking offences so that they can prosecute their own citizens regardless of where the offences took place.

The UN Organized Crime Convention requires a state's parties to establish jurisdiction to investigate, prosecute and punish all offences established by the convention on the trafficking of persons protocol, which Canada has done.

However, in 2009, the United Nations handbook for parliamentarians on combating trafficking in persons also notes that the Organized Crime Convention encourages the establishment of jurisdiction on an extraterritorial basis. In 2003, the UN resource guide to international regional legal instruments, political commitments and recommended practices stated:

The adoption of extraterritorial criminal laws against human trafficking is one of the many intersectoral and interdisciplinary measures required to effectively combat this phenomenon.

The UN guide also stated:

Extraterritorial laws should be appreciated realistically as one of the many complementary measures needed to eliminate human trafficking, coupled ultimately with the political and social will and cooperation to overcome this global phenomena.

Prior to tabling Bill C-310, I consulted with numerous stakeholders on this matter of extraterritorial offences. This included law enforcement, prosecutors, and non-governmental organizations.

On further reflection, I will be seeking a friendly amendment at committee stage to add sections 279.02 and 279.03 to this clause. These are offences of receiving material or financial benefit from human trafficking and withholding or destroying travel documents in the process of human trafficking. This would ensure that all of the acts around human trafficking are covered by extraterritorial offences and there is no chance for a Canadian human trafficker falling through the cracks.

The second clause of Bill C-310 would amend the definition of "exploitation" in the trafficking of persons offence to add an evidentiary aid for courts to consider when they are determining whether a person was exploited.

Private Members' Business

Evidentiary aids are already used in our Criminal Code. In fact, the evidentiary aid found in section 153(1.2) of the Criminal Code provides greater clarity to the courts on what constitutes sexual exploitation of a minor.

There is also an evidentiary aid found in section 467.11(3) that provides additional guidance on what constitutes participation in organization crime.

• (1725)

This amendment stems from consultations with law enforcement, lawyers and prosecutors who have faced challenges demonstrating exploitation and trafficking in persons under the current definition. They feel that the current definition of "exploitation" is worded in such a way that it has caused courts to interpret "exploitation" too narrowly. The current definition hinges on an assumption that victims feared for their own safety or for the safety of someone known to them so much that they were compelled to provide a labour or a service. This has often been interpreted as a concern for one's physical safety.

UBC professor Benjamin Perrin, in his landmark book on human trafficking in Canada called, *Invisible Chains*, writes that it could be argued that safety should not be restricted simply to physical harm, but also should encompass psychological and emotional harm. He goes on to point out that Canada's definition of "human trafficking" does not include methods of exploitation that are consistent with the UN Palermo protocol. The Palermo protocol states:

"Trafficking in persons" shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation.

The heart of this amendment is to provide an aid to the courts that clearly demonstrates the factors that constitute exploitative methods. In my amendment, I have proposed including "use or threats of violence, force or other forms of coercion and fraudulent means".

Similar to the first clause of this bill after it was tabled in Parliament, upon reflection, I believe it would be helpful to also include the term "use deception and abuse a position of trust, power or authority".

I will also be seeking a friendly amendment for these minor changes at committee to ensure this bill is sound and will accomplish what we want it to do.

I would like to share some of the feedback I have already heard from stakeholders regarding Bill C-310.

Jamie McIntosh of IJM stated:

The crime of human trafficking often transgresses international boundaries, with vulnerable men, women, and children subject to its devastating reach. Human traffickers, including those of Canadian nationality, will persist in their illicit trade if they believe their crimes will go unpunished. Extending authority to prosecute Canadians for human trafficking crimes committed abroad is an important step in the global fight against human trafficking. As a nation, we must commit to prosecuting Canadian nationals who commit these crimes, regardless of geographical location at the time of offence.

UBC law professor Benjamin Perrin said:

Human traffickers have evaded prosecution for their heinous crimes, in part, because Canada's criminal laws are not explicit enough to clearly encompass the

range of tactics employed by these serial exploiters....I call on all Parliamentarians to support this initiative.

Timea Nagy, who is the program director of Walk with Me, and a survivor of human trafficking herself, writes:

As an internationally trafficked survivor, who has been working with Canadian law enforcement to help human trafficking victims, I am absolutely thrilled to see this legislation.... This Bill will help Canadian law enforcement and prosecutors to be able to do their job and send a message to traffickers around the world, that Canada does not tolerate this crime against human dignity.

There are so many more organizations and experts that I could list but I do not have the time to do so. It is important that Parliament continue to act to combat modern day slavery. Human trafficking is a national and international crime and this legislation addresses both.

By supporting Bill C-310, each member of this House plays an important role in strengthening the tools used by police officers and prosecutors and in securing justice for victims of trafficking both here in Canada and abroad.

• (1730)

Mr. Earl Dreessen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for all the efforts she has made over the years to protect the young and the vulnerable both here and abroad.

Could she expand on why it is so important that we look at Canada's trafficking in persons offences from an extraterritorial perspective?

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, that is a very important question because that is the heart of this bill.

First, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would allow Canada to arrest Canadians who have left the country when they engage in human trafficking in an attempt to avoid punishment here in Canada.

Second, the extraterritorial human trafficking offence would ensure justice in cases where the offence was committed in a country without strong anti-human trafficking laws or strong judicial systems.

Third, an extraterritorial human trafficking offence would clearly indicate that Canada will not tolerate its own citizens engaging in human trafficking anywhere.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how could the crime of sexual exploitation be dealt with better in this bill in order to fight against the exploitation of Canadian women?

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but I missed the first part of the question.

However, I will say that the important thing is to support this bill to ensure that not only traffickers here in Canada but Canadians who go abroad and traffic children will know that they will be prosecuted here in Canada, even if they do it in a country where there are very lax human trafficking laws or lax judicial systems. That is very important.

Private Members' Business

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this bill. Does she have any idea how many Canadians are affected by this bill?

[English]

Mrs. Joy Smith: Sadly, Mr. Speaker, we do not have the exact number but a lot of Canadians have gone to other countries to exploit children. The Bakker file is very well known. The recent case of Mr. Wrenshall is also well known. There are numerous cases where individuals not only have exploited children, but they have also come back to Canada and have tried to reach into the country from where they came to get children from that country into Canada. This bill would stop that from happening.

•(1735)

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-310, which would amend the Criminal Code, clarifies legislation pertaining to human trafficking, a global phenomenon that requires the legislator to take a transnational approach.

This bill amends two provisions of the Criminal Code pertaining to human trafficking. The first change would make an addition to section 7 of the Criminal Code. It formally recognizes trafficking in humans as an extraterritorial offence that can be prosecuted in Canada, and applying to both Canadians and permanent residents.

The second change would replace section 279.04 of the Criminal Code in order to provide a more precise definition of the concept of exploitation. Hence, “...the Court may consider, among other factors, whether the accused, (a) used or threatened to use violence; (b) used or threatened to use force; (c) used or threatened another form of coercion; or (d) used fraudulent misrepresentation or other fraudulent means”, when determining whether or not there was exploitation. It should be noted that the bill also includes in the concept of exploitation the removal of an organ or tissue by the use of force, violence or coercion.

A number of experts have expressed concerns about the current legislation, which they believe is not detailed enough to allow the courts to prove the offence of exploitation. By including the content of article 3 of the United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime Protocol, the legislator is attempting to harmonize domestic law with international law in the area of human trafficking. Thus, in this article:

“Trafficking in persons” shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harbouring or receipt of persons, by means of the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of deception, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person, for the purpose of exploitation. Exploitation shall include, at a minimum, the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labour or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs;

In light of the extraterritorial nature of the offences set out in sections 279.01 and 279.011 of the Criminal Code, the legislator uses principles of international law in order to fight human trafficking, which must be strongly condemned. We must agree with strengthening the legislation to deal with these offences. This bill is one solution that will help limit this transnational scourge.

By making these amendments to the Criminal Code, Canada would only be respecting its international commitments. Canada signed this convention and its protocols in 2000 and ratified them in 2002. As a result, it is required to introduce legislation to recognize trafficking in persons as an offence.

I will take this opportunity in the debate at second reading of this private member's bill to talk about the difference between human trafficking and human smuggling, which is not addressed in these legislative amendments. Human smuggling is defined as a crime committed by any person who enables the illegal migration of other individuals by means of the organized transport of a person across an international border. By contrast, human trafficking refers to the recruitment of vulnerable persons for the purposes of various types of exploitation, generally in the sex industry or forced labour, through various methods of control.

Victims of human trafficking in Canada are unfortunately most often aboriginal women and girls who are sexually exploited.

•(1740)

Exploitation for the purposes of forced labour also exists in Canada. The people behind this type of 21st century slavery take advantage of the precarious legal status of foreigners under their control, who are often illegal immigrants. These immigrants are brainwashed and often fear testifying, since they worry that they themselves will be arrested or deported to their country of origin.

In conclusion, I would like to say that I support this private member's bill, which would aim to bring our legislation in line with international law.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to put a few words on the record. I had the opportunity to read over some of the comments by the Liberal Party's critic for justice and human rights and I thought he actually said it quite well. I will just repeat some of the comments that he has put on the record in previous times in the House because he has come to best understand this issue and the importance of it.

I will read the quote into the record again. He said:

We know that this grotesque trade in human beings now generates upward of more than \$12 billion a year.

In other words, he says that human trafficking is so profitable that “it is the world's fastest growing international crime. We know that the majority of victims who are trafficked are women and girls under the age of 25, and that many trafficking victims tragically also include children”.

UNICEF has estimated that 1.2 million children are trafficked globally each year. The International Labour Organization estimates that 2.5 million children are currently in situations of forced labour as a result of being trafficked.

He made reference to his daughter who has always counselled him, highlighting just how important this issue is and how important it is that we deal with it here in the House of Commons.

Private Members' Business

He further states that, "Simply put, trans-border trafficking is a multi-billion dollar criminal industry that challenges law enforcement people, that flouts our immigration laws, that threatens to spread global disease and constitutes an assault on each of our fundamental rights".

Our critic for justice and human rights was not able to express that here today and I just wanted to get that on the record.

I look at it from a personal perspective over the years. I can recall back in 1993 when I happened to be in the Philippines. After talking with some local residents, I distinctly recall one of the colonels, who was in the forces in the Philippines, telling me a story about one of his daughters. His daughter was being told about how she could ultimately come to Canada and work in a restaurant and so forth, and how wonderful an opportunity it would be for her. What ended up happening in this particular case was that the young lady was quite excited about the economic opportunity, the opportunity to come to Canada, and thought it would be a good thing to do. She came to Canada and quickly found out that the individuals who were promoting her being able to come to Canada were really bringing her into the sex trade here in Canada.

The colonel, back then, was obviously very upset to find that out. He was able to get his daughter back out of this horrific situation, and I am really glad for the family. However, as someone who was fairly young in politics back in 1993, it left a lasting impression because of the with which he passion and thinking about what would have happened had she not had that supportive father, someone who was truly in a position to get her out of the situation she found herself in here in Canada.

I will fast forward a number of years to when I was in Kansas. It was while I was on a parliamentary conference of sorts in Kansas that I really started to get a better appreciation of the degree to which it was a major world issue. I had observed a particular committee and, as fortune would have it at that time, they were talking about human trafficking, in particular dealing with the sex trade.

• (1745)

I was amazed by the numbers they were talking about. They were not talking about the odd case of women being brought over to feed the exploitation that is very real in North America today. They were not talking about a few or a hundred. They were talking about thousands of women being exploited through trafficking. That was an eye-opener for me and, since then, I have tried to keep up as much as possible on the issue.

I am aware of the bill the member has introduced to the House and of the previous bill she introduced, as well as some of the discussions that bill entailed. Many people from Winnipeg were following what was happening as it was an important issue. A number of people feel very passionate about this issue.

When I made some inquiries about 12 months ago on this issue, I was told that if we were to look at all the human trafficking that occurs around the world, we would see that somewhere in the neighbourhood of 80% is used in some form of sexual exploitation. When we think of sexual exploitation, there are two things that come to mind: one, the area of prostitution; and two, the production of pornography.

The more I look into it, I find it amazing the circumstances in which we often find the people being exploited, as well as how young they are. The member for St. Paul's made reference to one particular case that I believe involved a four-year-old boy. There is far too high a percentage of youth under the age of 10 who are being sexually exploited. I think it would not only sadden but it would anger a lot of people to hear of those numbers.

Then there is slavery. It is estimated that worldwide there is somewhere in the neighbourhood of between 20 million to 30 million people who are experiencing some form of slavery.

When we look at the whole area of exploitation, the impact it has on society and the role Canada can play on the international scene, I would suggest that legislation such as this does have merit. Canada can play a leadership role. As other countries have recognized the exploitation that is out there, Canada can too. There are things we can do that would make a difference.

We want to send a message to all Canadians that we have laws in Canada that we expect Canadians to abide by and respect. However, as a sovereign nation, we have the ability to ensure that there are consequences for Canadians who commit these hideous crimes outside our borders.

I believe we would find a great deal of sympathy from politicians and all Canadians to look into ways in which we as a society can say that it is not right and that there needs to be a consequence to what is taking place. In terms of this particular bill, it is something I see going to committee for some feedback from some of the stakeholders.

• (1750)

The member herself makes mention that she has some friendly amendments; we look forward to seeing those friendly amendments.

At the end of the day, I am sure there is a high sense of co-operation in terms of trying to do the right thing on the issue of exploitation of this nature.

Mr. Robert Goguen (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to discuss the legislation introduced by my colleague, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, which would strengthen our ability to hold human traffickers accountable for their crimes.

Private Member's Bill C-310 proposes two Criminal Code amendments to combat trafficking in persons. I support the legislation and applaud my colleague for her unwavering commitment to this issue. I urge all members to support the rapid passage of the bill into law.

The first thing the bill would do is enable the Canadian prosecution of Canadian citizens or permanent residents who commit either the human trafficking offence, section 279.01 of the Criminal Code, or the child-specific trafficking offence abroad, section 279.011. In other words, the bill proposes to provide Canada with extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute two of the four trafficking offences.

Private Members' Business

I support these amendments and pause here to note that it was another private member's bill introduced by the member for Kildonan—St. Paul that created the child-specific trafficking offence. It came into force last year, having received widespread support in Parliament. I note there appears to be the same widespread support this evening. That offence imposes mandatory minimum penalties of imprisonment for child traffickers, a punishment that is certainly fitting of this crime.

Canada does not normally assume jurisdiction to prosecute criminal conduct that occurs beyond our borders. Canada is not unique in this regard, and the reasons for not assuming jurisdiction for crimes committed abroad are based primarily on the principle of respect for the sovereignty of the state where the offence took place. In the limited number of cases in which Canada has extended prosecutorial discretion, it was because there was an international consensus to do so, which is most often reflected in an international treaty to which Canada is party.

Perhaps the most widely known example of this in Canada is our so-called child sex tourism offence, which allows Canada to prosecute Canadians who commit sexual offences against children while abroad. In this case, assuming jurisdiction to prosecute trafficking offences committed abroad would be based on our international treaty obligations contained in the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and its supplemental Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children.

Canada is party to both these treaties, which encourage, although do not require, countries to assume extraterritorial jurisdiction to prosecute their nationals for committing human trafficking abroad.

These proposed amendments will enable us to more fully implement these important transnational crime treaties.

We would not be unique in this regard. Countries with legal systems similar to ours, including the United Kingdom, the United States, New Zealand and Australia, have the ability to prosecute their nationals who commit human trafficking abroad. I am very pleased that this proposed legislation would move us in a similar direction.

I stop here to reflect on these amendments and whether it makes sense to include the two additional Criminal Code offences targeting trafficking in persons in these proposed amendments. Those offences—section 279.02, prohibiting the receipt of a financial or other material benefit from the commission of a trafficking offence, and section 279.03, prohibiting the withholding of travel or identity documents in order to facilitate trafficking—also provide important ways for the Canadian judicial system to respond to this horrific practice.

It seems to me that there is some logic in ensuring that all of the trafficking-specific offences can be prosecuted in Canada when they are committed by Canadians or Canadian permanent residents abroad. I for one would certainly support that kind of amendment were it brought forward.

Second, Bill C-310 would enact what I would call an interpretive provision that sets out a non-exhaustive list of factors that a court might take into consideration when determining whether the legal

test of exploitation has been made out for the purpose of human trafficking offences.

We all know that at the very core of the crime of human trafficking is the exploitation of another person. Traffickers deny victims their individual autonomy and employ force, threats and other forms of coercion in order to compel their victims to provide their labour or services, and, because trafficking is about the exploitation of another person, our criminal laws make exploitation a critical element to be proven.

• (1755)

The Criminal Code defines exploitation. It says that a person exploits another person if they:

cause them to provide, or offer to provide, labour or a service by engaging in a conduct that, in all the circumstances, could reasonably be expected to cause the other person to believe that their safety or the safety of a person known to them would be threatened if they failed to provide, or offer to provide, the labour or service

Our laws also define exploitation in the context of organ removal, but I will not focus on that aspect of our definition today.

The definition of exploitation that I have just noted provides a flexible test and captures the various ways that traffickers compel their victims to provide labour or service, including through physical or emotional coercion.

This definition requires one to look at the effect that such conduct would reasonably be expected to have on a victim, objectively speaking, while also taking into account the particular circumstances of the victim.

I believe this kind of flexible approach is critical in this area. Trafficking in persons is a crime that is not confined to a single act like assault or murder, but rather is a complex pattern of behaviours and actions on the part of the offenders that, taken together, result in the victim having no choice but to provide their labour or service.

Our laws must provide the flexibility to be able to address the continuum of conduct. In saying this, I acknowledge that there are some who believe proving exploitation is difficult, and while our trafficking laws may be clear, they must also be clearly understood.

I believe that it is in this vein that my colleague has proposed to create an interpretive aid for the purpose of assisting the courts in understanding the types of conduct that can be taken into consideration when determining whether exploitation has occurred. I support her efforts in bringing clarity in this regard.

It should be noted that this kind of interpretive aid is not unique in the Criminal Code. For example, subsection 153(1.2) provides a non-exhaustive list of conduct that a court may take into consideration when determining whether a relationship is exploitative of a young person. Section 153 is a sexual exploitation offence involving persons in a position of trust or authority.

Another example is subsection 467.11(3), which provides a non-exhaustive list of factors to consider when determining whether an accused participated in activities of a criminal organization.

Private Members' Business

The proposed amendment of clause 2 of the bill would list force, threats and other forms of coercion, as well as fraudulent misrepresentation, as being conduct that is relevant to consider in determining whether exploitation has been made out.

This is obviously so, but it will provide police and prosecutors insight into the kinds of evidence that may be relevant and in this regard will streamline and facilitate the investigation and prosecution process.

I am supportive of this amendment. I look forward to working with the sponsor to strengthen and pass the bill in a timely fashion. I urge all members to support this important piece of legislation.

• (1800)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to speak today on private member's Bill C-310, An Act to amend the Criminal Code in relation to trafficking in persons, put forward by the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul. I want to congratulate her on her work in this area. It is extremely important that this legislation be brought forward.

As the previous speaker said, it arises from Canada taking up obligations internationally under the treaty known as the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children, a supplement to the 200 United Nations Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

It is good that we are doing this. I know the member does not have another opportunity to speak, but it is worthy of note that it has taken some time for the kind of information in the bill to be passed. One would have thought that the government, instead of waiting for the work of a private member, would have taken this on—not necessarily the current government, but perhaps the previous government. The convention is very particular about definitions of exploitation, which we are finally putting into our own law, and I want to thank the member for bringing that forward.

It is all very well to use the term “exploitation”, but without proper definitions it is difficult for prosecutors and police to even know what evidence they have to present in order to get a conviction. I understand there have been only five prosecutions under this legislation since the amendments made to the Criminal Code in 2005. That seems to me to be an indication that there were serious deficiencies in the law. The evidentiary information that is required was not specific; now it will be.

Two aspects that the mover of the motion and bill put forward are very important. Extraterritoriality is obviously very important. It is extraordinary for us to do that, as previous speakers have said. In areas such as this, we are talking about a crime that is not committed only in Canada: the persons are brought here and continue to be exploited here, but much of the exploitative activity may indeed take place in another country. To have extraterritoriality is important.

The first time Canada has done this in recent years has been in respect of so-called sex tourism. Sexual exploitation of children or sexual pedophilia was the primary crime involved with Canadians travelling abroad for what came to be known as sex tourism. People were actually involved in promoting destinations for this purpose, to the revulsion of many Canadians.

The government was called upon to make this a crime of extraterritoriality. People have been prosecuted under those measures, and it has done something to suppress this particular criminal activity. We hope it will be equally successful in the case of the human trafficking that is normally brought to Canada, but within Canada it is being done as well, frankly. People are being brought from one place to another within Canada. Sometimes aboriginal people from reserves are brought to other parts of this country for exploitation, and this practice needs to be suppressed.

There are two things. One is the extraterritoriality, which we support and agree with. The second is the definition of exploitation, which is very valuable in spelling out some of the factors that can constitute exploitation. It is not conclusive or exhaustive, as the previous speaker indicated, but clearly it includes the use of violence or the threat to use violence and the use of force or the threat to use force—which may be two different things—as well as to use or threaten another form of coercion or to use fraudulent misrepresentation or fraudulent means.

Fraudulent means is probably one of the most common ones. It is carried out by suggesting that people come to Canada to do a particular type of work; then they are forced into either sexual exploitation, prostitution or forced labour. This is something that is not readily recognized, but both my colleagues opposite have mentioned it.

• (1805)

People have been put in servitude as a result of exploitation and human trafficking. It is very difficult for them to get out of this, because they are in places of victimization and under the control of other people. This is something that needs work. I would urge the member to talk to other parts of her government about this.

This convention talks about the countries that are party to it also taking measures, and this is extremely important. It says:

Each State Party shall consider implementing measures to provide for the physical, psychological and social recovery of victims of trafficking in persons, including, in appropriate cases, in cooperation with non-governmental organizations, other relevant organizations and other elements of civil society, and, in particular, the provision of: (a) Appropriate housing; (b) Counselling and information, in particular as regards their legal rights, in a language that the victims of trafficking in persons can understand; (c) Medical, psychological and material assistance; and (d) Employment, educational and training opportunities.

There is a whole other aspect of this. It says that when we do come across victims of this type of exploitation, we should not put them on a deportation list but protect them. Part of the threat against a person who is here is that the person who is exploiting the individual can frighten that person into believing that the government will deport him or her if the person exposes the exploitation. This is something that has to be looked after.

Article 7 of this protocol says:

In addition to taking measures pursuant to article 6 of this Protocol, each State Party shall consider adopting legislative or other appropriate measures that permit victims of trafficking in persons to remain in its territory, temporarily or permanently, in appropriate cases.

Private Members' Business

It is not automatic, but it should be considered so that if victims of exploitation are discovered, there may be special programs whereby Immigration Canada would say the individual would be put in a special category. Part 2 of Article 7 states, "...each State Party shall give appropriate consideration to humanitarian and compassionate factors". That implies obviously that particular circumstances should be taken into consideration.

Perhaps the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration should also be looking at this to see what programs or changes may need to be included in legislation. If we are truly concerned about this and want to follow through on what we agree to here, we ought to have other things.

This is a good step. It is an appropriate step, the extraterritorial and helping to define it. People may not come forward or feel they cannot come forward unless they have a sense that they will get the protection from Canada that they will need as victims to get out of the slavery or the exploitation or the abuse they are suffering. That is the important part here.

We support this legislation. I am proud to support this legislation. Members opposite from time to time suggest that New Democrats do not seem to want to support legislation that makes it easier to prosecute criminals and assist victims. Of course that is not true. That is a lot of rhetoric that we hear from time to time. A see a smile from my colleague on the justice committee. We do hear that a bit. We are here to do a proper job for Canadians and to make sure laws are passed that achieve the objectives that are stated.

In this particular case, it is entirely appropriate that we make this extraterritorial. It is entirely appropriate that we define threats and violence to assist in the prosecutorial efforts to suppress this activity and to punish those who take part in this activity.

It is also entirely appropriate that we ask for more. It may not be a private member who can deal with this. It may require the resources and the knowledge and the experience of the people who work in the Department of Citizenship and Immigration to achieve the proper tools and the proper legislation.

I fully support and endorse Bill C-310. I sought to be one of the co-seconders but I understand it was oversubscribed. That is a good indication that this is a measure that deserves the support and consent and implementation by the House and by the government.

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to rise to speak to Bill C-310. I want to thank the member for Kildonan—St. Paul for the incredible work she has done in being an advocate for this. I thank her and her family. Her husband and son have made a great sacrifice.

I think of William Wilberforce 200 years ago, who was the conscience of the British Parliament. He gave his life to see human trafficking, slavery, ended. In this Parliament we have a Wilberforce in the member, who has worked tirelessly to see modern-day slavery, human trafficking, end. I again thank her.

We have heard comments in the House today already that there appears to be unanimous support for this bill going forward. Wilberforce spent most of his life, many years, arguing in Parliament. He was nicknamed the conscience of the British

Parliament. Hopefully this bill will pass very quickly so we can deal with this important issue.

The most vulnerable members of society tend to be those who are most likely to fall victim to this horrible crime. So often the most vulnerable do not have the ability to advocate for themselves. My colleague's unwavering support and determination to improve Canada's anti-trafficking responses and advocacy for those without a voice is to be commended and ensures that we as parliamentarians remain vigilant against this criminal activity.

I appreciate the opportunity to debate this bill. It affords each of us as parliamentarians the opportunity to once again discuss this serious issue of trafficking of persons. A week ago a number of young people came to my constituency office and presented 240 letters. These were young people horrified to realize that this happens in this day and age. They were from Walnut Grove Secondary School and I admire their courage and tenacity in calling on Parliament to make these important changes.

My colleague has already provided an overview of the bill and I support her comments. I do not intend to discuss the proposed amendments in any great detail, other than to say that I support this bill wholeheartedly and am committed to working closely with the sponsor to ensure it achieves its objectives.

I know that the Government of Canada has demonstrated a willingness to work with all parties, the international community and other stakeholders to address the crime of trafficking in persons. The government takes very seriously the task of improving Canada's criminal law responses in order to protect the vulnerable, to hold offenders to account and to improve community safety. These principles, offender accountability, protecting the vulnerable and standing up for Canadian communities, are at the very core of this bill and are objectives that the government strongly supports. I believe they cut across party lines and are unanimously endorsed by all members in the House. I am sure that in the spirit of collaboration we will quickly pass this bill into law.

The Government of Canada has long recognized the importance of a comprehensive, coordinated, multi-sectoral strategy to respond to trafficking in persons. The government's approach has focused on four specific objectives: one, preventing trafficking; two, protecting the victims; three, prosecuting offenders; and four, working in partnership with others. The four Ps approach has served Canada well and we remain at the vanguard of anti-trafficking efforts around the world.

Building on this approach, the government is committed to releasing a national action plan on human trafficking to better guide Canadian efforts. I applaud the government and my friend, the member for Kildonan—St. Paul, for their commitment and believe that an action plan will further strengthen our ability to prevent this crime, protect victims and hold traffickers accountable.

Adjournment Proceedings

I would like to highlight a few examples of recent federal efforts. Recognizing the importance that a strong knowledge base can play in supporting ongoing responses, last year, in 2010, the government released a study examining the question of whether a national data collection framework could be established and the challenges associated with doing so.

•(1810)

The study and its recommendations continue to provide valuable guidance to all jurisdictions in Canada that are looking at this important issue.

Also last year, in 2010, the RCMP released its national threat assessment on human trafficking. The objectives of the assessment were to identify the extent of trafficking in persons in Canada, as well as organized crime involvement, transnational associations, source countries and trends involving foreign nationals and domestic victims.

The assessment includes analysis of organized criminal groups with suspected involvement in human trafficking, as well as discussions of issues, challenges and intelligence gaps that affect enforcement efforts in the disruption of human trafficking activities in Canada. In that way, the assessment aims to provide strategic guidance for enforcement efforts.

I know the government is also working hard in the areas of prevention and awareness and has recently launched into two national awareness campaigns—

•(1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order, please.

The hon. member for Langley will have about four minutes remaining for his speech when the House next returns to this order of business.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*Translation*]

FLOODING IN MONTÉRÉGIE

Mr. Tarik Brahma (Saint-Jean, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on June 8, I asked the Minister of Public Safety about our soldiers' involvement in the cleanup effort following the flooding in Montérégie, more specifically in the riding of Saint-Jean.

The people of my riding were harshly affected by the flooding in the region last spring. As is the case in any natural disaster, it was a time of high stress and great concern for all those affected. In fact, the victims of this disaster are still dealing with the repercussions today.

When the Richelieu River crested and caused the flooding, I asked the minister to explain the government's reaction to this natural

disaster. My question was specifically on the lack of solidarity shown by this federal government during this situation in particular, and during past natural disasters in general.

The minister said that the Canadian Forces did an outstanding job. I agree that when the Canadian Forces finally arrived, and during the very short time they were there, they did excellent work, and I am very grateful for the help they provided to the people of my riding. We appreciated their service and know-how, which are invaluable at times like these.

That is precisely why we asked the government to make people's safety its top priority, to show solidarity with the victims and to send the army as soon as possible in order to allow the people, the flood victims, to remain in the region to help with the cleanup. Our forces have the skills, training, know-how and experience needed to tackle situations like the terrible flooding that occurred in the Saint-Jean riding and across the Montérégie region last spring.

We needed the Canadian Forces to ensure that the evacuations were carried out properly and that no lives were put in danger because of the situation. I am extremely grateful to have the opportunity to represent a community that has shown that it can really come together during tough times. At the same time, it was very irresponsible of the government to ignore its obligation to ensure public safety.

I remember the minister saying that the Canadian Forces should not have to compete with the private sector. This brings a question to mind. When he said that, was the minister thinking of the safety of Canadians as a simple consumer good? Would he not agree that it is the government's duty to ensure the safety of Canadians?

He said something else that I found rather shocking. He said that helping the flood victims with their home repairs was not the Canadian Forces' role. So, the same question applies. Does the minister not believe that, in an emergency situation, making a house safe and livable is a matter of public safety?

•(1820)

Mr. Chris Alexander (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): To begin, Mr. Speaker, I would like to reassure the hon. member for Saint-Jean that this government stands by the people of Montérégie who were affected by the flooding and all those affected by disasters across Canada. This has been a year marked by flooding and forest fires in many provinces. Of course, the Department of National Defence remains committed to fulfilling its obligations in terms of national security and helping affected communities. That is what we did in Saint-Jean and the other communities throughout Canada, providing help to civil authorities during a particularly active season for natural disasters.

I would like to thank the hon. member for recognizing the expertise, know-how and contributions of the Canadian Forces in Saint-Jean. They were there not just once, but twice. The first time they stayed until the waters had stopped rising. The second time, a bit later in the summer, they were there during the flood, when the waters of the Saint-Jean River rose even higher.

Adjournment Proceedings

My duty and my commitment to the hon. member and to the opposition members who are seeking an answer to this question is to remind the members of this House of the role that the Canadian Forces play during a natural disaster and of the concrete contribution they made this summer in Montérégie and elsewhere in Canada. We empathize with the people in Quebec and Manitoba who have suffered so much, as well as with those who were affected by the forest fires in Saskatchewan, Alberta and Ontario. Although it was not hit as hard as Montérégie, New Brunswick also experienced fairly serious flooding.

It is a top priority for the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Forces to deliver excellence at home and to ensure the safety and defence of the people of Canada when a crisis occurs. The Canadian Forces are proud to help civilian authorities by responding to a wide variety of situations that may threaten our country, in particular, natural disasters.

In the wake of a natural disaster, such as a snow or ice storm—something for which Quebec and Ontario are famous—fires or major flooding, the Canadian Forces can use their unique abilities to help the civilian authorities. When such situations occur, the Canadian Forces deploy to the affected area immediately following the catastrophe to offer their help and they stay there until their unique abilities are no longer needed. That is exactly what they did in Montérégie this summer.

The help the Canadian Forces provide depends on the nature of the request. Specialized abilities, particularly in the areas of engineering, security, transportation, aviation and logistics, may be required. The Canadian Forces can also provide support to health services, various vessels, dive teams and satellite imagery services.

As the hon. member knows, follow-up to these operations is a provincial responsibility. The government offers programs that share the financial burden of this second phase of public assistance through the Department of Public Safety.

• (1825)

Mr. Tarik Brahmi: Mr. Speaker, I must say that I am still looking for answers. I am a bit disappointed since I asked a question of the Minister of Public Safety, but it was the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence who replied. Everyone agrees that the Canadian Forces have done a remarkable job, but my question was about public safety.

Since Canadians have every right to expect the government to have a specific action plan to deal with disasters, I had these two questions for the Minister of Public Safety, who unfortunately is not here. What lessons were learned about public safety from these tragic events? What concrete measures will the government take, before next spring, to assure Canadians that they will never again find themselves in the same situation as the flood victims in Montérégie?

Mr. Chris Alexander: Mr. Speaker, the immense, wild nature of this country cannot be controlled. Neither this government nor any other is able to prevent natural disasters in the country. However, we remain absolutely determined to ensure that one of the Canadian Forces' highest priorities is the duty to provide help to civilian authorities in the event of a natural disaster. This year, their level of commitment in that regard has broken almost every record.

In the case of operation Lotus, in Montérégie, more than 800 soldiers provided their help at the height of the operation. They repaired two major dikes, filled 224,000 bags of sand, spent more than 1,100 hours helping members of the community make checkup visits and protected more than 800 private residences.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. Your time has expired.

The hon. member for Halifax.

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect the government to protect their environment. I do not know if Canadians necessarily expect the present government to protect their environment, but they want guarantees that the air, water and soil are healthy, and that future generations would not be burdened with our failure to protect the environment today. However, I do not think the present government sees environmental stewardship as a priority and I think that is a huge mistake.

As we know, a healthy and biologically diverse planet is probably the most important gift that we can give to our children and grandchildren. This includes preventing socio-economic ramifications based on inaction on climate change and the protection of the ozone. That is why recent cuts announced by the government to Environment Canada have left Canadians wondering whether the government is actually committed to improving the quality of environmental monitoring and protection in Canada, and whether or not the government truly understands the risks it is taking with our health, environment, economy and, frankly, with our national security.

The Conservatives regularly pay lip service to the idea of environmental stewardship. We see this in the throne speech and in answers during question period, but the evidence is always to the contrary.

For example, cuts to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency of 43% and the elimination of one-third of its staff fly in the face of any premise for improved environmental protection. I think the same can be said of the fact that nearly 800 positions will be eliminated from Environment Canada, and that would leave about 300 departmental staff unemployed. These workers are scientists and researchers. These cuts would severely limit the agency's ability to prepare and respond to threats to the environment.

We have heard no commitment from the government on its plans moving forward. Also, we have not heard about any analysis the government has done on what would happen with these cuts. The Minister of the Environment has said that the cuts made to the department will not affect core services. This is something he keeps saying, but he has refused to say what is a core service, or what he considers to be a core service.

Adjournment Proceedings

Water protection programs are being cut. Programs respecting the duty to consult first nations on environmental degradation are at risk as well. These are important services that I think a lot of us would consider core services.

The minister also insists that programs will not be cut, but some of the programs that we do run in Environment Canada are staffed solely by one scientist. Therefore, if we lose that scientist, we are in fact losing an entire program.

In that vein, if we look at the cuts to Environment Canada, the government has greatly reduced the department's ability to monitor ozone science, such as the Canadian ozone science and monitoring program. The government has decided that it is time to cut funding to this kind of essential program.

This is a made in Canada solution to an international problem. We are renowned the world over for the work that we are doing in ozone. It is something that we should be celebrating, not something that we should be cutting.

Action by the government domestically has further garnered an international critique of Canada's commitments to its international partners. These ozone cuts have attracted criticism from scientists around the world.

I have the following questions to the parliamentary secretary tonight. Why does the government insist on cutting these programs, which would be cut through the elimination of staff? What proof does it have that these cuts are even needed? What would be the impacts of these cuts?

•(1830)

Ms. Michelle Rempel (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I actually share my colleague's viewpoint and I know our government does as well, in acknowledging that protecting our environment is important.

That is why we have taken concrete action on protecting Canada's environment. We are also cognizant of the fact that we need to do that within a framework of protecting Canada's fragile economic recovery.

Again, I am in agreement with the member in sharing that effective and timely environmental assessment through the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is very important for our country, especially with regard to ensuring sustainable economic growth for Canada.

I hope the member shares our view that we are also responsible for ensuring that we are wise stewards of taxpayers' dollars. With specific regard to her question around the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency, which was the content of the question put to the House on the order paper, any suggestion that the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency is being cut by 43% is highly misleading.

As the member opposite may remember, the president of the CEAA, Ms. Elaine Feldman, appeared at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development on October 25, 2011. Referring to the 43% difference in funding reported by CEAA, Ms. Feldman said, "These are not cuts".

To continue dealing in fact-based information, in 2007 under the cabinet directive on improving the performance of the regulatory system for major resource projects, CEAA took on additional responsibilities for environmental assessment and aboriginal consultations.

To meet these responsibilities, the agency was allocated \$11 million per year for five years. An additional \$2.3 million per year has been provided for aboriginal consultations associated with review panels. Five years have now nearly passed and these funds are due to sunset at the end of fiscal year 2010-11.

The 43% difference my colleague referred in funding at issue here are in fact sunsetting funds. These are term defined funds due to sunset at the end of this fiscal year. For that reason, the agency has projected a decrease in the agency's budget if the sunsetting funds are not renewed.

Just to be clear to the House and to answer my colleague's question, a decision regarding whether or not to renew these sunsetting funds has not been made yet. The agency's funding has not been cut.

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank the parliamentary secretary for her comments and her answer.

When it comes to the cuts, something that is sunsetted and not renewed is a cut. We have had no indication that money will be renewed. The agency has actually prepared contingency budgets for not having that money. As far as I am concerned, that is a cut.

As the member knows, we heard from Paul Cassidy today at committee. He is a regulatory affairs lawyer who specializes in environmental assessments. He talked about the fact that this is going to be something that will be very difficult for the agency to manage.

In this day and age when we have things like the unimpeded or unmanaged expansion of the oil sands, for example, there are more and more reasons why we actually need to do environmental assessments. We need to look at things like cumulative effects. We need to do a good job of this.

In fact, I think they are cuts. I want to know from the department what its analysis is of how these cuts will impact the agency.

•(1835)

Ms. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, again, the money provided to the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency through budget 2007 was provided to be cognizant of the fact that we needed to have increased capacity for certain programs that were coming up.

These programs were time limited and that is why the sunsetting funds were put into place. That is also why we are reviewing them. Many different programs across government have sunsetting clauses because we are responsible to review these programs, to be wise stewards of taxpayers' dollars.

Just to clarify, I disagree with my colleague's stance that this is a cut because we have not made a decision on whether or not to review this funding. We are doing our job as government to review the efficacy of this and whether or not we need continued funding.

Adjournment Proceedings

Just to be perfectly clear, the 43% is not a cut because it was part of a natural sunsetting clause. We are in the process of reviewing that right now.

VETERANS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is actually the second consecutive night that I have had the opportunity to participate in the adjournment proceedings. I am pleased to see my colleague from the veterans affairs committee, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, here for the second night in a row as well.

Last night, I perhaps made an error using my four minutes to pose four questions because I did not get answers to any of them. So I posed them again in my one minute segment and still did not get answers.

I am going to try it a little differently tonight. I am not going to need the four minutes. I have a straightforward question.

Will the parliamentary secretary confirm that she intends to vote on Thursday at committee to kill public hearings on the budget cuts at Veterans Affairs, and explain to veterans and Canadians why?

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the minister could not have been clearer in answering the question about whether or not veterans' benefits would be cut. The expert witnesses we heard today at committee could not have been clearer on whether or not veterans' benefits would be cut. So I will add my voice to answer the question

for the member for Charlottetown and let me say it very simply and very clearly. There will be no cuts to veterans' benefits.

Mr. Sean Casey: Mr. Speaker, I believe perhaps the parliamentary secretary has misunderstood my question. My question was whether she intends to vote on Thursday at committee to kill the public hearings on the budget cuts at Veterans Affairs.

I understand her position. I understand the party line that veterans' benefits are not being cut. The fact is that the Department of Veterans Affairs is going to spend less money this year than last. Its budget has been cut. I understand the party line to be that veterans' benefits will not be cut, but the budget at Veterans Affairs is being cut. There are hearings going on into the matter. Is she going to kill them?

Ms. Eve Adams: Mr. Speaker, let me try one more time in French.

[*Translation*]

There will be no reduction in the benefits provided to veterans.

[*English*]

There are no cuts to veterans' benefits.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:39 p.m.)

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 037 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 26, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1405)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for London West.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mrs. Tilly O'Neill Gordon (Miramichi, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize the brave and courageous service of a young constable from my local Miramichi Police Force named Andrew Vickers.

On October 19, a woman threw herself into the Miramichi River in an attempt to take her own life. Constable Vickers braved strong currents and frigid water temperatures to save a life, while at the same time risking his own. Constable Vickers was supported through the rescue by Sergeant Les Saunders and Corporal Charlie Barter, who both provided encouragement and assistance. Following the rescue, the Miramichi Fire Department dispatched a boat to have the woman transported to the nearest ambulance. Thankfully, these efforts were successful and a life was saved.

This event shines a light on the vital importance of our essential services to communities across this country. It reminds us that suicide and mental health are serious problems that affect individual lives everywhere.

We on the Miramichi are happy to see Andrew following in the footsteps of his dad, a proud father, our very own Sergeant-at-Arms, Kevin Vickers.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SOUTH SHORE COMMUNITY CREDIT ASSOCIATION

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to celebrate the 10th

anniversary of a community credit organization on the south shore, ACERS, the Association communautaire d'emprunt de la Rive-Sud. Over the years, ACERS has supported hundreds of potential entrepreneurs in my region who were eligible for non-traditional funding to establish their businesses. By fighting poverty and social exclusion through community credit—money loaned by individuals in the community—ACERS has helped low-income individuals start businesses and create their own jobs. One example is textile designer Mary-Lou Senécal, who was an unemployed mother in 2008, but who has now been running MaryChâle for three years and employs two other people. For 10 years, ACERS has played a unique role on the south shore and works in partnership with key socio-economic organizations in the region.

This year, 17 new entrepreneurs achieved their dreams. More than 200 people have taken advantage of the association's community credit services. This past weekend, in Alma, the general council of the New Democrat Quebec section adopted a resolution to support the development of community credit. Long live community credit and long live ACERS.

* * *

[*English*]

2011 QUINTE BUSINESS ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand in the House today to recognize the 2011 Quinte Business Achievement Award recipients from my riding of Northumberland—Quinte West.

Among those businesses recognized are: NOD Apiary Products Ltd. received the Agribusiness of the Year Award; Harbourview Marina was the recipient of the Environmental Leadership Award; Machining Centre Inc. received the Manufacturing Business of the Year Award; and RiverSide Music was recognized with the Business Excellence Award. Among the entrepreneurs recognized are Dr. Tanya Rawluk, who received the Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award, and Glenn Kozak, who received Business Person of the Year Award.

Those entrepreneurs and local businesses are dedicated, innovative community leaders who will ensure that the private business sector continues to flourish in Quinte West. I would like to congratulate all recipients of the 2011 Quinte Business Achievement Awards and wish them all the best in their future endeavours.

*Statements by Members***KEN RITTER**

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I learned of the passing this week of Saskatchewan farmer Ken Ritter, the first producer-elected chairman of the Canadian Wheat Board. He was just 64 years old. He held degrees from three different universities, taught school in Australia and practised law in Regina, but Ken's home and heart were on the farm in west central Saskatchewan.

He was an active citizen through rotary, Kinsmen and hockey, through surface rights arbitrations and farmland security legislation, as a commissioner on the National Transportation Agency and then, for a decade, elected director and chair of the Canadian Wheat Board.

Intellectually rigorous with a passion for honest debate, Ken was an innovator, always generating new ideas to better serve farmers.

With his three children, Ramon, Felice and Nicole, eight grandchildren, other family members and many friends, we will cherish his memory.

● (1410)

MARTIN GOUDREAU

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day Canadian military personnel risk their lives to protect our nation.

On June 6 of last year, Sergeant Martin Goudreault from my riding paid the ultimate price in Kandahar doing the job he loved: leading soldiers. Sergeant Goudreault is survived by his parents, Aurel and Micheline, and two sisters, Chantal and Valerie. His last deployment was a reconnaissance with 1 Royal Canadian Regiment Battle Group.

On Saturday, October 15, his hometown of Temiskaming Shores honoured him by naming the beautiful park overlooking the community in his honour. He will continue to watch over his community. He will be forever remembered for his sacrifice.

God bless Sergeant Goudreault. Dieu bénit sergeant Goudreault.

[Translation]

SAINT-LAMBERT

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to greet the people in my riding of Saint-Lambert.

Over the past weeks, I have met with representatives of various community groups in my riding. I would like to thank the following groups in particular: Le Virage, la Table itinérance Rive-Sud, la Maison de la famille LeMoigne and La Traversée. The work they are undertaking in their respective communities is remarkable.

I would like to focus on the wonderful work being done by La Traversée. Since 1984, this organization has given considerable help to thousands of women and children on Montreal's south shore who have been victims of sexual abuse. The organization's violence prevention and philosophy for children program is being used in

Quebec schools and is generating more and more interest outside the province as well.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the team at La Traversée for all that they bring to our community.

I will continue to bring the concerns and hopes of the people of Saint-Lambert here to the House and thus I will, to the best of my abilities, defend the best interests of our riding.

[English]

ATLANTIC AGRICULTURAL HALL OF FAME

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Atlantic Agricultural Hall of Fame will induct Bill Pryor of Williamstown-Centreille, New Brunswick.

While nominated by the New Brunswick Cattle Producers in recognition of over 50 years of contributions to the farm community and farm families, Bill has a deep understanding of many sectors of agriculture.

Those who know Bill are very aware of the current health challenges he is facing in his battle with ALS. However, during one of my recent visits, he was all smiles after the family had taken him out to visit the cattle in the family vehicle.

He also did not miss the chance to speak to me about suggestions on the next round of ag programs. Bill has always considered the future of agriculture, including the support of 4-H, specifically his commitment to the 4-H component of the Carleton County Spring Show and Sale. The first 4-H steers were exhibited in 1963 and, to his credit, the show continues to be a success today.

Bill has a positive influence on the industry that has been so near to his heart. He is truly deserving of this hall of fame recognition. I thank Bill for sharing with me just some of his expertise but, more important, his valuable time. I congratulate my friend.

SPINAL CORD INJURIES

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to bring attention to a situation that affects over 86,000 Canadians today and 4,300 more Canadians every year.

I am referring to Canadians living with spinal cord injuries at great personal cost to themselves and costing billions of health care dollars every year.

Today, 25 members of this House and the other place are spending their working day in wheelchairs to get a tiny taste of the challenges that people with spinal cord injuries face in everyday activities that we take for granted. This is the annual chairleader event, sponsored by the Canadian Paraplegic Association, and I am proud to be a part of it.

Statements by Members

Many Canadians with spinal cord injuries have accomplished great things and have provided us with inspiration, people like Rick Hansen, athletes like Chantal Petitclerc, and our own colleagues in this House from Montcalm and Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia.

We need to do more than take inspiration from these people. We need to raise awareness of the challenges that all Canadians with spinal cord injury face and do everything we can to support treatment and, very important, research and development.

We have made a lot of progress but there are many steps left not taken.

* * *

• (1415)

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARDS FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to pay tribute to a group of Canadians who deserve our special congratulations. They are the exceptional teachers who have received the Prime Minister's Awards for Teaching Excellence.

These teachers, from all provinces and territories, have been nominated and judged as exemplifying the best qualities of teaching.

In my own province of Newfoundland and Labrador, we have Catherine Downey, David Gill and Corey Morgan, a superhero teaching trio at Amalgamated Academy in Bay Roberts, who were awarded the Certificate of Excellence.

Glenn Normore and Darla O'Reilly of Holy Trinity in Torbay; Sean Penney of Holy Heart and Yvonne Dawe of Bishops College, both in St. John's; and Erin Walsh of St. Peter's in Mount Pearl were all awarded the Certificate of Achievement.

I ask all hon. members to join with me in congratulating these award-winning teachers and, through them, all teachers throughout our country who dedicate their careers to giving our children the guidance, the skills and the inspiration they need to be the best that they can be.

* * *

DIWALI

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the resounding mandate of 67.4% given to me by the people of Calgary East in the recent election is testament to the faith they have placed in me and in our Conservative government. We will not let them down.

In the past year, our government has increased OAS benefits to seniors and helped fund affordable housing construction. As part of the Asia-Pacific Gateway, we are in the process of upgrading 52nd Street South East, which will enhance the safety and efficiency of transportation infrastructure.

We are working hard to keep our streets safe and neighbourhoods free of crime. In this regard, we remain committed to passing the safe streets and communities act within 100 sitting days.

Before I finish, I would like to remind all members that today is Diwali, the Festival of Lights. My family and I take this opportunity to wish everyone a happy Diwali and a prosperous New Year.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LA MOUVANCE WOMEN'S CENTRE

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognize the work of La Mouvance, Centre de femmes, a very dynamic organization serving the Saint-Eustache region. This organization helps break the isolation of women by providing services for the various stages of their lives.

I would especially like to acknowledge the dedication of Angèle Poulin, who has devoted herself to La Mouvance, Centre de femmes in Saint-Eustache for over 22 years. Her many accomplishments include organizing events in the Deux-Montagnes RCM for the World March of Women, creating a food assistance program, contributing to the founding of Maison d'Esther, establishing La Chanterelle, a drop-in daycare centre, and organizing conferences on health and legal aid.

On October 12, 2011, Ms. Poulin was awarded the Order of Saint-Eustache and the title of “great citizen”. I would like to thank her for the work she does and wish La Mouvance continued success.

* * *

[*English*]

ALEXANDER JOHNSTON

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier today, a Canadian soldier was laid to rest with full military honours at Cantimpré Canadian Cemetery in Sainly-lez-Cambrai, France.

Private Alexander Johnston died during the Battle of the Canal du Nord on September 29, 1918, a battle fought during the final 100 days of the war.

Private Johnston was born in Scotland in 1885 and moved to Hamilton, Ontario in his late twenties. He fought as part of the 78th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in Raillencourt-Sailly, France.

The remains of this former steelworker were discovered in 2008 and were identified through DNA testing earlier this year.

Private Johnston paid the ultimate price in the service of our country. This morning, it was Canada's honour and duty to properly lay this brave soldier to rest.

*Oral Questions***RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT PRINCIPLE**

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the 10th anniversary of the Responsibility to Protect Principle, which authorizes international action “to protect a state’s population from genocide, war crimes and crimes against humanity” if that state is unable or unwilling to protect its own citizens, or worse, is the author of its criminality, as in the recent case of Libya, is not only a landmark normative principle but has been characterized as the most significant development in the defence of human rights since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948.

Yet, given that there have been millions of preventable deaths over the past 10 years, what ultimately matters is translating this principle into practice, organized around the four pillars of: the responsibility to prevent to begin with; the responsibility to respond and protect; the responsibility to bring war criminals to justice; and the responsibility to rebuild.

In a word, this principle is about saving lives, about protecting international peace and security, and about protecting human security we ignore at our peril.

* * *

• (1420)

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

We are united as Conservatives from coast to coast to coast to end the measure that unfairly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. It does nothing to keep guns out of the hands of dangerous criminals.

However, there is nothing but division within the NDP on this important issue. And no one need take my word for it. The opposition House leader confirmed it on Friday.

Canadians are confused as to where the NDP stands. The member for Thunder Bay—Superior North said that the registry was “ineffective” to stop crime. However, the NDP leadership candidate from Outremont said, “to destroy the long gun registry is to destroy lives”. The NDP member for Davenport said that he was for an “all out ban” on guns.

The NDP members need to be honest with Canadians. Will they stand with this government and end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all or will it force its members to—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

* * *

MULTICULTURALISM

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to recognize the 40th anniversary of the policy of official multiculturalism in Canada.

Canada has always been a meeting place of diverse cultures. From the distinct traditions of Canada’s first nations, to the waves of

immigrants from across the world who have come to call Canada home, we are a shining example to the world of multiculturalism at work.

We have managed to create a country of tolerance and respect. We have built a nation where we can unite as Canadians while retaining our unique customs, languages and traditions. While we join together as proud Canadians, we celebrate our differences.

Multiculturalism is not always an easy proposition. It can be challenging to understand the perspectives of people who do not share one’s background, religion or cultural practices. However, official multiculturalism recognizes that these challenges are well worth overcoming.

In communities across Canada, we recognize that diversity makes us a stronger, more vibrant society.

On behalf of every member of the official opposition, I express our best wishes for another 40 years of celebrating multiculturalism.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Rodney Weston (Saint John, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada is leading the way. Yesterday, Standard & Poor’s affirmed Canada’s AAA rating. Standard & Poor’s noted that Canada’s superior economic situation and strong monetary policy make Canada a stable force amid global economic uncertainty.

Our Conservative government has been focused on what matters to Canadians: job creation and promoting economic growth. This is just another example of Canada’s global economic leadership, which includes the strongest job growth record in the G7, the soundest banks in the world, and forecasts showing that Canada’s economy will be among the strongest in the G7 this year and next.

However, Canada is not immune to the economic turbulence facing the global economy. That is why our government is working hard to implement the next phase of Canada’s economic action plan and its job creation measures. The last thing Canadian families need now is the NDP’s massive job-killing tax hikes that would cost jobs and hurt the economy.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Finance finally realized that his numbers were too rosy, that he had been overly optimistic with his economic projections. He could have saved a lot of time if he had listened to the NDP.

Despite the flip-flop, the minister is still intent on cutting services to people and giving big gifts to big corporations. Why does he not take this opportunity to change direction?

Oral Questions

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thankfully, we did not listen to the NDP, because had we done so, we would have massively increased our deficits, our debt, our taxes, and we would really be in the soup.

Instead, we took the responsible course. We paid down debt when the times were good. We have managed to responsibly control spending while investing in the economy during the global downturn. We have cut taxes cumulatively by \$190 billion, for over \$3,000 for the average family, leading Canada to have the strongest economy in the G7. As well, we have created over 650,000 net new jobs.

•(1425)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the session, the NDP has been saying that the government is wrong, that the Minister of Finance has to face the facts and that his projections are too optimistic. Economists are echoing the warnings of the NDP, the IMF and many others. The question now is whether the Conservatives are going to make the necessary corrections, since the minister rather reluctantly had to downgrade his economic forecast.

Will he finally go the rest of the way and cancel the next corporate tax cut?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government has a plan for creating jobs. That is how it has created more than 650,000 new jobs since the beginning of the global recession. The NDP has a plan for killing jobs. It wants to increase taxes for job creators. We are against this destructive plan that will cut the number of jobs available to Canadians. We are pleased that Standard & Poor's has again today affirmed Canada's AAA rating because of—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that the number of homicides committed with long guns has decreased, the Conservatives have decided to turn a deaf ear with regard to the firearms registry. They are turning their backs on women, victims, the police, the victims' ombudsman and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. They are even going to destroy the data in their ideological blindness.

Why destroy \$2 billion in accumulated information when the provinces and the police want to keep it?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is true that we are getting rid of the ineffective and useless long gun registry. I agree with a number of experts on that.

[*English*]

Let me quote someone who said, "I have always believed that the gun registry is a failure in principle and a failure in policy, and that we could have done much better with different policies." Who said that? It was the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore.

Another member said, "My intention is to see the wasteful long gun registry ended." Who said that? It was the NDP member from Thunder Bay.

Another member said, "I've always opposed the long gun registry because I thought it was unfair to law-abiding firearms owners." Who said that? It was the NDP member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new information released today by Statistics Canada shows that homicides in Canada are at a 45 year low. The main factor is fewer deaths caused by rifles. Yet, on this very day, the Conservative government wants not only to turn its back on police, but also to burn all the data that helps keep the homicide rate in Canada low.

Why is the government putting a divisive ideology ahead of our communities' safety?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the registry has done nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. In order to protect the privacy of law-abiding long gun owners, records held by the Canadian firearms program on currently registered long guns will be destroyed.

Let us be clear. The only reason the NDP wishes to retain these records is to reinstate the long gun registry whenever it is in the position to do so. What we will do is abolish the long gun registry once and for all.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister's answer is no excuse to destroy life-saving data that would help police keep our streets safe. The Conservative government's plan is tantamount to a \$2 billion bonfire. It wants to destroy the data that police use 17,000 times a day and which the police have asked the government to keep. The police deserve a fighting chance against gun crime in Canada. If provinces also want to maintain this information for their own use, they should have the right to do so.

Why is the government handcuffing law enforcement in Canada by burning all the records?

•(1430)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as one woman from the Georgian Bay Women's Outdoors Workshops stated:

As a woman, the long gun registry does not make me feel any safer or more secure. It is wasteful, ineffective and reduces funding to do real things. The 2 billion dollars that have already been spent would have been better used on programs like healthcare, childcare, women's issues and allocating moneys to policing agencies to fight criminal and real crime.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has been an important officer of Parliament for 20 years and has always been bilingual. Even the new position description published in the *Canada Gazette* stated that proficiency in both official languages is essential.

How does the government explain that its nominee is not bilingual?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government voluntarily sought bilingual candidates for this position. In the end, this candidate was chosen on the basis of merit. Mr. Ferguson has made a commitment to become a fluent speaker of both official languages and has begun taking courses. We commend him for that.

[English]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has put the House in a difficult position. When the Prime Minister asked the leaders of the opposition parties for their views on this particular candidate, the government did not disclose the fact that he was unilingual. It did not tell us that fact. Now we are facing a situation where we find that this is the case.

We had assumed that because it was in the *Canada Gazette*, the government was going to meet the criteria which it itself had set out in the *Canada Gazette* when it was advertising for this position.

For the last 20 years, the Auditor General of Canada has been bilingual. Every single officer of this Parliament has a working capacity in both languages. Surely the government—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member is out of time.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, the government voluntarily sought candidates who were bilingual. This candidate, after an exhaustive process with many candidates, was identified as the most meritorious candidate—

Mr. Marc Garneau: That's unbelievable.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. Members will come to order.

The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Speaker, again, the government voluntarily sought candidates who were bilingual. There was an exhaustive selection process. The most meritorious candidate in the process was selected. It is clear from the leader of the third party's remarks that he was found to be a quality meritorious candidate. Mr. Ferguson has undertaken to become proficient in both of our official languages and he has already begun taking courses to do so.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is incorrect. I told the Prime Minister in my correspondence with him that I had no basis upon which to judge the qualifications of the individual in question and that it was going to be up to the

House to make that decision. Members can look at the official correspondence if they want.

We were never told that the candidate was unilingual. That remains a fact.

Is it the position of the government that there is no competent, qualified and fully meritorious candidate in this entire country who is bilingual? Is that the government's position? It is a ludicrous—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Again, Mr. Speaker, there was an exhaustive selection process. Many candidates were considered. Mr. Ferguson was identified as the best qualified candidate for the position. He was selected on that basis. Of course, the candidates are referred to the House for this position.

I would underscore that Mr. Ferguson has committed to become proficient in both of our official languages and has already begun the process to do so.

* * *

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, information obtained by the NDP reveals just how out of touch the Conservative government is with families in need. Almost 25% of people who call Service Canada about their EI hang up because they cannot reach anyone. Half of all seniors who call for help do not even get an automated message. Now, Conservatives want to take an axe to Service Canada.

As the economy slows down, why is the government cutting services that struggling families rely on?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, we are doing just the opposite. While our priority is to ensure we create jobs and growth in the economy, for those who do need to access EI, we are modernizing the service. We are automating the service so Canadians can get better service, so they can get it faster, and so it is more affordable. We are working on that and we are making good progress so we can help Canadians.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Patry (Jonquière—Alma, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canadians who have lost their jobs and who so desperately need help are losing hope. Almost 25% of people who call Service Canada about their EI hang up because they cannot reach anyone to get answers to their questions. That is unacceptable. Imagine the problems that there will be when EI processing centres close.

Families who have lost their jobs deserve better. Why is the Conservative government abandoning families when they need help?

Oral Questions

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we want to help those who need access to EI. We are modernizing and automating the system so that Canadians can get better service, so they can get it faster and so it is more affordable.

[*English*]

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, seniors who built this country are being left out in the cold by the government. Half of all CPP-related calls to Service Canada are completely ignored. There is no one to help, not even an automated message. Seniors are looking to their government for the help they deserve, but all they find is a dead phone line.

Why are Conservatives proposing more cuts after they have already failed to provide even basic services to seniors?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has her facts wrong. We are consolidating and improving the service for seniors and indeed for all Canadians. We are working right now, and have been working for some time, with some very old, outdated systems, very cumbersome paper systems.

That is why we are automating systems, to make the service faster, more effective and more efficient, so we can indeed help seniors and all Canadians get access to the services and benefits to which they are entitled.

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the facts are simply not in line with the government's answer. The Conservatives are going to cut services that are already broken. They refuse to lift seniors out of poverty and now Service Canada will not even answer the phone. Our seniors deserve better from their government. Canadians are just learning about those service reduction problems, but the Conservatives have known about it all along.

Will the government cancel the cuts to Service Canada, or just keep ignoring our seniors' calls for help? The phones are ringing.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I explained, we are consolidating the processing of employment insurance. That will have absolutely no impact on services to seniors such as CPP and old age security. Why are we doing this? Because we are dealing with an antiquated paper system that needs to be replaced and automated, so we can provide services faster, more accurately and that are more affordable.

As for Service Canada, we are keeping all of our front line personnel in place, so Canadians can get access to the services they need.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if this is the government's response, perhaps the government does not understand what people are going through.

In September, nearly one in four Canadians was unable to reach anyone at Service Canada about their EI. Half of all seniors calling about CPP and old age security had to hang up because they could not reach anyone. Meanwhile, the government continues to make cuts at Service Canada.

Do the Conservatives consider these cuts to services acceptable when more and more people are unable to get through and have to hang up?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are improving the services that Service Canada provides to Canadians, including access to the guaranteed income supplement and pensions. We have improved services for seniors. Unfortunately, the NDP voted against these improvements.

• (1440)

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are saying that they are doing better than previous governments, but this is not the sort of attitude that really helps people.

Canadians are still not getting any answers from Service Canada and they are getting even fewer answers from the Conservatives in the House of Commons. The Conservatives are telling Service Canada and its employees to do more with less. However, statistics show that the services currently being provided are already inadequate.

When will this government understand that overburdening Service Canada workers will not result in better service to the Canadian public? It is a simple question and the answer should be simple as well. What impact will the new cuts to services have on the public?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have a responsibility to taxpayers: to put their money to good use. That means that Service Canada must operate effectively. That is why we are improving and modernizing our systems so that they are more effective, efficient and affordable. This will allow us to provide better service to Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as RCMP contract talks resume this week, Conservatives continue to bring more threats than ideas to the negotiating table. The province and municipalities have said they are ready to negotiate in good faith in order to keep B.C. families safe. They are asking the government to be serious and constructive.

When will the minister stop using the public safety of British Columbians as a bargaining chip?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that the solicitor general of British Columbia forwarded some of her concerns that she indicated that she would provide to me in September. I understand officials are sitting down and working together with British Columbia officials.

Oral Questions

I understand, at the same time, that some of the municipalities, which are looking at moving from municipal police forces to the RCMP, would like this settled. I would urge the British Columbia government to look at the proposals that we have on the table. We will look at what it presented and come to a fair conclusion.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, with weeks left it shows how out of touch Conservatives are with reality. Conservatives are asking British Columbians to pay hundreds of millions of dollars to the federal government for rejecting its unfair HST and now Conservatives are threatening to pull the police off our streets.

The province and municipalities are ready and willing to talk, so when will the government stop playing games with our public safety and start listening to British Columbians?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, perhaps the member did not hear the answer. Officials are sitting down to look over the proposals that the solicitor general from British Columbia finally forwarded to the federal officials. I thank her for sending those proposals to us. I would urge the officials to work out the bugs that remain in this contract and get to ensuring that we have an appropriate RCMP contract in place.

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is constantly bragging about its law and order agenda, but it is threatening to pull the RCMP off British Columbia streets if it does not agree to a new labour contract by the end of November. Fortunately, negotiations will resume this week.

British Columbia families are wondering whether the Conservatives will start working in their best interests and in the interests of their safety, or if the Conservatives will continue to threaten to pull police officers off the streets.

British Columbia is prepared to negotiate in good faith. Are the Conservatives prepared to do the same?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I provided the answer and I do not know if the individual heard me. I would like to quote the Canadian Police Association which members opposite should take to heart. It said:

We're quite satisfied with the efforts this government has made to work on behalf of front line police officers, specifically with respect to the comprehensive justice legislation that has been a priority since the last election.

We would ask the NDP members to get off of their high horse and actually do things that make a difference to front line police officers and the citizens they serve.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the world teeters on the cusp of another downturn, with the turmoil and risk today in Europe, especially, will the government take three sensible steps to help make Canadians less vulnerable? Cancel \$1.2 billion in job killing EI payroll tax increases, give seniors flexibility in managing their RRSPs and RRIFs, and make tax credits equally available to low income kids, caregivers and volunteer firefighters, not just the more wealthy.

Would the government do these three sensible things?

•(1445)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I did meet with the private sector economists, as I usually do before the fall economic update and of course before the budget each spring. We are on track for modest economic growth in Canada. We are certainly relatively better off than other industrialized countries.

We did the economic action plan when it was required. The Liberals of course did not support the economic action plan when it was needed a couple of years ago. It has helped create 650,000 net new jobs in this country.

I am pleased that we have taken steps in this budget that is before the House to increase—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wascana.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us be very specific. There are about 25 million Canadians who file tax returns. About 15 million report taxable income, but close to 10 million do not because their incomes are not high enough.

However, they do have children who want to be in arts programs. They do volunteer to be firefighters. They do provide home care to sick or elderly family members.

Why are these 10 million lower income Canadians less worthy than those who are better off? To include them would cost something less than \$80 million. Why will the government not simply do this?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when we have taken steps like the member suggests, like the arts credit for children and the economic action plan, he voted against them, as did the Liberal Party.

I am very pleased that Moody's recently confirmed Canada's top credit rating, a triple A credit rating, and yesterday Standard & Poors did the same thing, saying, "Canadian authorities have a strong track record in managing past economic and fiscal crises and delivering economic growth".

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's police want to continue to access the data in the long gun registry. The province of Quebec would like to use the data to create its own gun control system.

This is no more a matter of privacy than car registration. Why is the government so intent on destroying a database that could be so useful to the provinces? Why does the government think it can destroy the past and control the future?

*Oral Questions***NATIONAL DEFENCE**

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the registry has nothing to do with keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.

In order to protect the privacy of law-abiding, long gun owners, those whom that member and his party subjected to gross violations of their privacy, records held by the Canadian firearms program on currently registered long guns will be destroyed.

Let us be clear. The only reason the NDP and the Liberals want those records maintained is in order to reinstate the long gun registry, should they ever form a coalition to do so.

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[Translation]

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that cuts to the public service could prevent qualified young workers from getting good quality jobs. Furthermore, the government's newly lowered growth projections do not predict anything good for our young workers.

We have an unacceptable unemployment rate of over 14%. What is the minister doing to stop wasting the talent of our young people?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, both the IMF and the OECD anticipate that Canada will have the strongest economic growth in the G7. We have the best job creation record in the G7, 650,000 jobs since the end of the recession in July 2009.

We have the strongest banking system in the world, the strongest fiscal system in the world, and the best net debt to GDP ratio in the G7. As I said, we are on track for modest growth this year and next.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives love to present misleading job creation numbers. The truth is that we have lost 220,000 jobs for young people since the recession began. Unemployment is up, economic indicators are down and, according to the Bank of Canada, our economy is slowing to a crawl. Conservatives want Canadians to believe that corporate tax giveaways to profitable companies are the answer. It is not.

When will the minister have something more than empty talking points to offer jobless Canadians?

• (1450)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I invite the member opposite to tell the 650,000 Canadians who are working now as result of the economic action plan that their jobs do not matter to them and that the government's policy has not mattered to them.

This is the policy that the NDP voted against. This is the job creation policy that NDP members talk about, but every time we bring a measure to the House, they vote against the measure, depriving Canadians of jobs. Now they have the nerve to suggest job creation programs.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has proven that he is good at misdirection, rhetoric and personal insults. What he is not so good at is giving straight answers. The minister hurls accusations of fearmongering, but the biggest source of fearmongering is the minister's refusal to clear the air on base closures.

The minister is the only who can put military families and their communities at ease. Will he please stand in his place and assure military base communities that they have nothing to fear?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, me thinks he doth protest too much. When it comes to fearmongering, he is referring to a report that was late. The October 2011 departmental directive, which he is referring to, does not speak of base closures. What does reference in an accompanying news article is a Liberal senator musing about base closures.

The only person who is causing alarm in the military community, their families and in the country and misleading Canadians about base closures is the member opposite.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a copy of the directive to which the minister refers. It says:

We will also reduce portfolio size, footprint and associated overhead costs by consolidating Defence operations and programs to fewer operational sites.

Again, does this mean base closures, yes or no?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, sound and fury signifying nothing. Let me be clear about what the NDP members are up to, and we have seen this before. It is an old opposition tactic. Create a crisis, panic people, put fearmongering out there among military families and then when it does not happen, claim credit. That is what they are up to.

The member opposite is simply trying to create a crisis that does not exist. The NDP does not support the military, it does not support the investments and that is unfortunate.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know that economic development and greater self-sufficiency can lead to a better quality of life for first nations across Canada and contribute to a strong Canadian economy. Once more, when first nations are full participants in the Canadian economy, all Canadians benefit.

Could the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development tell the House how our government is working with first nations to achieve these important steps?

Oral Questions

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is working with our aboriginal partners. Just last week I signed a memorandum to expedite economic development with Chief Robert Louie and Chief Austin Bear of the First Nations Land Management Board and Resource Centre. This will allow additional first nations to manage their land base free from the Indian Act.

In addition, this week, at the Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business conference, our government announced further investments supporting economic development. This creates jobs for first nations, Inuit and Métis across Canada.

These are concrete examples of where our government continues

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

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[*Translation*]

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that the hon. member for Parry Sound—Muskoka managed a \$50 million slush fund from his constituency office. We know that, despite the presence of a number of senior officials, no documents were handed over to the Auditor General. And, surprise, now we find out that he did not act alone. Other ministers joined the party when they were invited to submit infrastructure projects.

Does the government continue to believe that no new facts have surfaced and that the ministers involved in the G8 scandal did nothing wrong?

•(1455)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that the former infrastructure minister made these decisions. Each dollar has been accounted for. Not a penny is missing, as Mr. Wiersama, the former Auditor General, has said. He said that he knows what they got for that money. Thirty-two projects were funded and the government announced each one. They can be found on the department's website.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are among friends. We can tell it like it is. Wasting \$50 million of taxpayers' money, using government coffers for personal political spending—it all smacks of a great political, financial and ethical scandal.

The Conservatives are saying that they want to implement the Auditor General's recommendations. If one of these recommendations were to have Parliament get to the bottom of this, would the government agree to submit to a full royal commission on the G8 scandal?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario,

CPC): Mr. Speaker, there already has been an inquiry into it. There has been an exhaustive review by the interim Auditor General.

If I could quote a truly great Canadian, "the facts have not changed". Everyone could take a moment now to recognize that truly great Canadian, the hon. member for Calgary East.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 139 days and the Muskoka member is still hiding behind the backbenchers and not explaining why he hid the paper trail in his office.

The Auditor General said that he broke the rules and called on Parliament to investigate. That was before we learned about all the other cabinet ministers who were taking his lead and going to the pork buffet as well.

How many other ministers circumvented the rules, took this man's lead and used the taxpayers' Treasury Board as their own personal cash machine?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I clearly could not say this with the same level of eloquence as my colleague for Calgary East, but I will try to explain it for the hon. member, who has heard this answer so many times before. The minister responsible for infrastructure made this decision, all 32 projects were public, every dollar was accounted for and the projects came in under budget. That is the reality.

The reality also is that the member across the way has promised his constituents time and time again to support the elimination of the long gun registry. Will he honour his word, do the right thing and vote for our bill to do just that?

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the big game hunter on the backbenches is going to take down this scandal, he is going to have to put a little more ammunition in his pop gun.

The facts are that since the Muskoka minister has to hide behind members like him to answer, I will do him a favour and I will speak for the Muskoka minister. He said "If set up a parallel process where the Auditor General did not know, I would be resigning right now and turning myself into the local police".

The question for my good friends on the Conservative backbenches is this. Will someone volunteer, do the right thing, help this verbally challenged minister, put up a hand and call 1-800-Huntsville PD.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member continues to ask the same question, so he will continue to get the same answer.

Oral Questions

The reality is that the former minister of infrastructure made this decision. He has taken responsibility for it. The reason we know what these projects are is because they are all published on the Infrastructure Canada website. There are 32 of them. We know where the funds went. We know that it came in under budget. We know every dollar went toward building the projects that have been published.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the chair of the veterans affairs committee. Tomorrow he has scheduled a secret meeting, but we are supposed to be hearing from witnesses in public. Liberals submitted a list of witnesses concerned about the cuts, people and organizations like the ombudsman, the Royal Canadian Legion and many others.

Why is the Conservative chair holding secret meetings? Are the Conservatives plotting to cancel public hearings?

• (1500)

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, had the member listened—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Hon. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry I was interrupted by the red kindergarten.

Had the member been attentive at the last committee meeting, he would have clearly understood that we are maintaining and investing in our veterans. We are doing that with skilled professionals who are working in our department, in Charlottetown, in our regional office, and with the full support of this government because we support our veterans.

* * *

HEALTH

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, firefighters from across Canada were in Ottawa to discuss three vital issues that are as much about the safety of all Canadians as they are about support for our front-line rescuers. Firefighters are asking for a national public safety officer compensation benefit, amending the National Building Code and providing priority access to vaccines.

As firefighters are the first to respond to an emergency and constantly put the well-being of others before their own, will the Minister of Health commit to protecting all Canadians by allowing firefighters priority access to vaccinations in case of pandemic?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had a great opportunity yesterday to have this discussion with the member who posed the question this afternoon.

As I stated yesterday, protecting the health and safety of Canadians who are most at risk must be a priority for any government during a pandemic. The chief public health officers in the provinces and territories, who are the medical experts, recommend vaccine priority according to the nature of the pandemic

virus and the risk to the population. As well, the provinces and territories delivering health care are also responsible for the rollout of vaccines in their jurisdictions.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a quote of the member for Brant of April 14. He stated, “The Canadian Wheat Board...should be decided upon in terms of its existence by the farmers themselves in a plebiscite or a vote as to whether it should continue with the mandate it was originally given”.

If the member for Brant can understand this basic principle of fairness and democracy, what on earth is wrong with the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food? How can he let the members who are in conflict of interest vote on the future of the Wheat Board when he will not allow the same right to the very prairie farm producers who rely on it for their economic well-being?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a tremendous quote here, too. Let me put this on the record. It states, “when the government is intending to change the legislation, I honestly don’t see the grounds for going to court. The government has the right to change the legislation. I don’t see the case for taking it to court”.

That was said by the member for Winnipeg Centre.

Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government’s proposed dismantling of the Wheat Board is already having a negative impact on Churchill. Things are already being cleared out of the port. People are being told that shipments will not be coming through. They are worried about losing their jobs and having to uproot their families.

Why is the government creating chaos and uncertainty in communities like Churchill and communities across the Prairies? When will it put aside the interests of big agra and stand up for western Canadians and their communities?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): What we are trying to do on the government side, Mr. Speaker, is bring clarity and certainty to the grain industry in western Canada. What is not helpful is when the chair of the Wheat Board, Allen Oberg, and his seven friends from across western Canada bring uncertainty to this role. That is the problem that we are having with Churchill. Those guys are implementing a scorched earth policy, trying to prove the inevitable by simply being intransigent to this change that we are trying to bring.

Freedom to western Canadian farmers is priceless.

*Oral Questions***FIREARMS REGISTRY**

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. My constituents have told me repeatedly that they want to see an end to this measure, which needlessly and unfairly targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. We see the long gun registry as no less than an attack on our way of life.

Could the Minister of Public Safety please update the House on what our government is doing to address this important issue?

• (1505)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for the work that he has done on this important file.

On May 2, Canadians gave the government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all and that is exactly what we are doing.

Canadians across the country have called for this measure. For example, Michelle Vardy of the Georgian Bay Women's Outdoors Workshops and the Ontario Federation of Anglers and Hunters stated:

As a woman, the long gun registry does not make me feel any safer or more secure. It is wasteful, ineffective and reduces funding to do real things. The 2 billion dollars that have already been spent would have been better used on programs like healthcare—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for St. Paul's.

* * *

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (St. Paul's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today 25 parliamentarians from all parties are participating in the Canadian Paraplegic Association's fantastic chair-leaders event to experience first-hand the obstacles that people with disabilities face every day.

We understand that after five inaccessible years the minister responsible for persons with disabilities has finally moved her constituency office. We hope the minister will welcome the opportunity to rise in the House today, advocate for accessibility and reassure the House that her new office on Kent Street in Simcoe is totally accessible.

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has done more than any other to help people with disabilities and ensure that we have an environment that is fully inclusive across the country. That includes my new office in Simcoe, Ontario. I am pleased to say that we were finally able to secure that.

I would also point out that the Office for Disability Issues that is part of the government for the first time is now accessible, because it was not under the Liberals, and is a full model of accessibility not just for the mobility impaired but for the visually—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for New Westminster—Coquitlam.

SHARK FINS

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Toronto is the latest city to join others in Canada and across North America in banning the sale and use of shark fins. Up to 75 million sharks are finned and thrown away at sea every year, often while still alive.

Will the government work with us to end this practice and ban the import of shark fins to Canada?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, shark finning is an offensive practice. It has been banned in Canada since the early 1990s.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today Allen Oberg confirmed that he will be launching a reckless and baseless legal challenge against the federal government for bringing marketing freedom to western Canadian farmers.

In September of this year he stated:

There's no doubt you wouldn't want a board that's of the belief that this whole thing won't work and that it's a recipe for failure.

Mr. Oberg is actively working to prevent marketing freedom for grain farmers by using any means possible.

As Mr. Oberg launches this reckless legal challenge, will the Minister of Agriculture remind the House of its ability and duty to pass this important legislation?

Hon. Gerry Ritz (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a government we not only have a right to change legislation, we have a responsibility to deliver on our promises.

Farmers have earned the right to market their own grain, whether on an open market or through a voluntary Canadian Wheat Board.

The director of the Wheat Board said today as he resigned:

The CWB's decision this week to launch a legal challenge against the Federal Government over the proposed changes to the CWB ACT...is simply wrong.

That says it all.

* * *

[Translation]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, homelessness and the lack of affordable housing are not just big city problems. In my riding of Trois-Rivières, the Le Havre shelter does not have enough beds to meet the demand. I would like to congratulate all the community organizations that have become involved and offered their assistance, but it is only a short-term solution.

When will this government take care of families in need and adopt a long-term strategy to provide Canadians with affordable housing?

[English]

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two years ago we extended the five-year program for housing and homelessness. Through our economic action plan we have 14,000 projects under way to build, or renovate existing, affordable housing operations.

Unfortunately, we did that in spite of the NDP because that party voted against every one of these initiatives to help people get the housing they deserve.

* * *

• (1510)

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are true believers in the abolition of the firearms registry.

In addition to abolishing the registry, now they want to destroy all its records. This would prevent Quebec, which has asked for the data, from salvaging a tool that saves lives, a tool that has cost nearly \$2 billion in public money—part of that from Quebec, a tool the Conservatives now want to trash. What a waste.

Does the Conservative government, which brags about its openness toward Quebec, intend to reply to the request by Quebec's public safety minister to have the data returned, or will it again thumb its nose at the unanimous will of the National Assembly of Quebec?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, our position has not changed. We made an election promise to abolish this expensive and ineffective long gun registry. We have a bill before Parliament and I hope that the opposition members will support us because we feel that there is a consensus among Canadians to have effective measures to fight crime. This registry has not prevented criminals from obtaining firearms.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

The House resumed from October 25 consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: It being 3:11 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion.

Call in the members.

• (1520)

(The House divided on the motion, which was negated on the following division:)

Business of Supply

(Division No. 45)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Blanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boularic	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Diomme Labelle
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dusseault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Fortin
Freeman	Fry
Garnneau	Garrison
Genest	Genest-Jourdain
Godin	Goodale
Gravelle	Groulx
Harris (Scarborough Southwest)	Harris (St. John's East)
Hassania	Ilsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellaway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Masse
Mathysen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)	Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)
Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)	Murray
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Nunez-Melo
Pacetti	Papillon
Patry	Péclat
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Raynault	Regan
Rousseau	Sandhu
Savoie	Scarpaleggia
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	St-Denis
Sitsabaiscan	Stoffer
Stewart	Thibeault
Sullivan	Tremblay
Toone	Valcriote — 126
Turmel	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Amblar	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Batemann
Benoit	Bernier

Points of Order

Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisum	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hillyer
Hoepner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leeff	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Oliver
Opitz	Paradis
Payne	Penashue
Poilevire	Preston
Raitt	Rathgeber
Reid	Rempel
Richards	Richardson
Ritz	Saxton
Schellenberger	Shea
Shipley	Smith
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Loan
Vellacott	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Williamson	Wilks
Woodworth	Wong
Young (Vancouver South)	Yelich
Nil	Zimmer— 150

PAIRED

The Speaker: I declare the motion defeated.

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

During question period today, the member for Winnipeg Centre quoted this member as saying something that I categorically did not say. I would like him to table the document that he is referring to where that quote was made, as well as the source and the time that he is referring to for the quote he put forward.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to. I appreciate the opportunity to table the time, the location, and the date; in fact, the member can go onto YouTube right now and watch the entire movie. It was the April 14 all candidates' debate for the federal election campaign.

I could read the quote again if he likes, if he wants to double-check: "The Canadian Wheat Board should be dis—"

The Speaker: Order, please.

The hon. member for Wascana is rising on a point of order.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am rising to seek clarification from the Chair with respect to an incident that occurred in question period today. A very specific question was addressed by a Liberal member to the chair of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

The chair was pre-empted from answering the question by the intervention of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. I would point out that the question did not pertain to the responsibility of the government or the minister. The question related to the work of the committee, which would be under the purview of the chair and the members of the committee.

I am seeking clarity from you, Mr. Speaker, about the proper procedure in this sort of matter. Is it now permissible in the House for ministers to effectively muzzle the chairs of committees and impose on committees the views of the government? We always take the position in the House that committees are masters of their own affairs, that they determine the time of meetings, the witness lists and the order of business. The work before the committee is under the control of the committee.

If it becomes permissible for ministers simply to pre-empt all that—to take that responsibility away from the chair and to place it under the minister—then I think we have undergone a rather profound change in our long-held traditions with respect to the proper functioning of our committees.

Mr. Speaker, I seek your clarification on that matter, because it is very important to the integrity of how our committees function.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if I may be of assistance, your predecessor, Speaker Milliken, set out quite clearly what the practice is in circumstances like this. On February 7, 2008, there was a question addressed to a chair of a standing committee. I think that happened twice, and the government House leader at the time responded. The Speaker, Mr. Milliken, advised clearly that the role of the Speaker is to "...take a look at those who are standing to answer and choose who is going to answer".

Routine Proceedings

When that question came, I looked very carefully and saw that only one individual was rising to answer, so I believe you responded appropriately and in accordance with the practice that had been established and articulated clearly by Speaker Milliken.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think we need to be clear. When the chair of a committee is asked a question, it is none of the government's business; it concerns the committee. If ministers can now muzzle committee chairs, what is the point of having parliamentary committees? We need to be careful. We do not want to set a dangerous precedent.

•(1525)

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I rise simply for the sake of completeness. I omitted to advise the House of the dates in question: February 7, 2008, in *Debates*, page 2743, and February 8, 2008, pages 2835-2837. This is all referenced in O'Brien and Bosc at page 506 in footnote 90, if people wish to see the definitive ruling.

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, there is one further point on this matter to draw to your attention because of the importance of the independent integrity of the committees of the House.

It would seem to me that if the chair of a committee chooses not to rise in his or her place, as the government House leader has suggested a committee chair might choose to do—that is, not answer the question—it would then be appropriate, Mr. Speaker, for you to turn not to a minister of the government, who is not in charge of the order of business before a committee, but to a vice-chair of that committee, and to invite the vice-chair to respond on behalf of the committee, because it is the committee, not the government, that is in charge of the agenda of committee business.

[Translation]

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the important work done by parliamentary committees, their chairs and all committee members. I myself have had many opportunities to be a member of a committee. As we all know, committees have their own rules and procedures.

But we are in the House of Commons now, and the question the member asked was clearly addressed to me, since it was my department officials who answered the question. Unfortunately, the member was not paying attention, which is why I thought it a good idea to remind him that we are maintaining all programs for veterans and we will continue to do so.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wanted to intervene because I am a bit concerned about the comments from the government House leader.

We do have committee chairs who are not on the government side of the House and who act under the responsibility and right of the official opposition.

I would not want the interpretation or ruling of Mr. Milliken, the Speaker at that time, to be read as meaning that a minister can stand up when a question is directed in particular to a chair whose responsibility is that of the official opposition and not of the government.

Mr. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): On the same point, Mr. Speaker, the committee will meet again tomorrow. Then, presumably, I will get my answer, live and in colour.

If the same question is posed tomorrow, will it be the chair of the committee or the minister who will answer that question?

The Speaker: I thank the members for their interventions. I assure that House that I will take this matter under advisement, consult the various books of precedents and procedure and get back to the House in due course.

The hon. member for Hamilton Centre.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during the course of question period and specifically during the questions I asked, there were calls from the government benches, and I believe also from the Minister of National Defence, for me to table the document I was referring to in my question.

Given the fact that we would like as many Canadians as possible to see this document and draw their own conclusions, I seek permission to table this document before the House.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to table the document?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

SECURITY INTELLIGENCE REVIEW COMMITTEE

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the 2010-2011 annual report of the security intelligence review committee, in accordance with section 53 of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service Act.

* * *

•(1530)

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation from the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union concerning its participation at the International Parliamentary Conference entitled “Parliaments, Minorities and Indigenous Peoples: Effective Participation in Politics”, held in Chiapas, Mexico, from October 31 to November 3, 2010.

Also pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union concerning its participation at the Parliamentary Conference on the Global Economic Crisis, held in Geneva, Switzerland, May 7-8, 2009.

*Routine Proceedings***COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE**

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the membership of legislative committees on Bill C-11 and Bill C-18.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 113(1), the report is deemed adopted.

* * *

[*English*]

OIL AND GAS OMBUDSMAN ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-336, An Act to establish the Office of the Oil and Gas Ombudsman to investigate complaints relating to the business practices of suppliers of oil or gas.

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to reintroduce my bill calling for the creation of an oil and gas ombudsman on behalf of consumers right across the country who are tired of getting hosed at the pumps.

While it is true that the combination of growing demand, worries over the turmoil in the Middle East and the closing of several strategic refineries in eastern Canada will continue to keep gas prices high for the foreseeable future, it is also true that speculation by unregulated derivatives traders and index investors operating without enough government oversight exacerbates those price hikes.

Rampant speculation has thrown the fundamentals of supply and demand right out the window, and if the supply and demand fundamentals cannot discipline the price discovery, then the price can be whatever it wants, and any excuse can be used.

That is where the oil and gas ombudsman would step in. The ombudsman would be charged with providing strong and effective consumer protection to make sure that no big business can swindle, cheat or rip off hard-working Canadians.

As it stands right now, people can only complain to each other about being gouged at the pumps. Clearly that is not good enough, so my bill creates a meaningful vehicle for having those complaints taken seriously, with effective mechanisms for investigation and remediation to help consumers fight the squeeze.

I am pleased to report that my bill has been endorsed by the Consumers' Association of Canada and that it is being seconded today by the NDP's critic for gas prices, the member of Parliament for Windsor West. Together we will put an end to highway robbery.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

ALBINISM IN TANZANIA

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a motion to the House that was unanimously supported at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs. I believe if

you seek it, you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That this House:

1) condemn the murder and mutilation of Tanzanian adults and children with albinism for their body parts;

2) express the support of the citizens of Canada for people with albinism in Tanzania who have been the victims of such attacks;

3) recognize that the murder and mutilation of people because of this genetic condition constitutes what UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon has called an “unacceptable violation of human rights”;

4) urge the Government of Tanzania to prosecute actively and aggressively and convict all perpetrators of these crimes;

5) call on the Government of Tanzania to take immediate action to prevent further violence against persons with albinism and to bring to swift justice those who engaged in such practices;

6) notify officially the Government of Tanzania of this.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Langley have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House had heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

• (1535)

PROPOSAL TO DIVIDE BILL C-10

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP) moved:

That it be an instruction to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that it have the power to divide Bill C-10, An Act to enact the Justice for Victims of Terrorism Act and to amend the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other Acts, into two bills; the first containing the provisions of the Bill with respect to sexual offences against children, and consisting of clauses 10 to 31 and 35 to 38, and the second containing all other provisions of Bill C-10.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to present this motion, which I think is extremely important to all Canadians.

Right now we have before the House what is known as an omnibus bill on criminal justice. It is a complex bill consisting of nine separate pieces of legislation. Bill C-10 is rather lengthy and complex with over 100 pages dealing with various matters. In fact, the long title of the bill refers to enacting a justice for victims of terrorism act and amending the State Immunity Act, the Criminal Code, the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act, the Youth Criminal Justice Act, the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and other acts. It is complicated because the legislation deals with a number of individual topics.

Our proposal is that the provisions relating to sexual assault and sexual matters relating to children be dealt with separately. The rationale for this is very simple.

Routine Proceedings

The complexity and controversial nature of the entire bill is such that it would take a considerable amount of time for it to get the proper consideration by this House in accordance with the proper form, through committee, third reading, and through the other place, before it became law. There is some urgency with respect to the provisions of this bill in relation to sexual offences against children. That is essentially part 2 of the bill, although we have not included all of this in the instruction.

There is an original act which has to do with terrorism and lawsuits against foreign states. There are particular provisions that deal with sexual offences against children. There are amendments to the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, amendments to the Criminal Code in relation to conditional sentences, amendments to the Criminal Records Act, amendments in relation to the international transfer of offenders, amendments to the Youth Criminal Justice Act, which are very particular and complex, and amendments to the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. It is a very complex bill, some of which has been debated before and some of which has not.

There is a particular reason that sexual offences against children ought to be considered and debated separately. We believe this can be dealt with fairly quickly in the House and also in the other place. The other place has indicated there would be fairly quick passage. I believe these provisions have passed through the other place before. We could anticipate fairly quick passage to make this law within a very short period of time so that prosecutors and police would have the opportunity to make use of it.

There are some provisions of this legislation that we agree are necessary because they add some new offences to the Criminal Code, particularly in the case of sexual offences against children.

There are new provisions which would prohibit, as a new and specific crime, making pornography available to children. Giving pornography and pornographic images to children would be a separate offence which could be prosecuted separately and would not have to involve other activity.

The second new provision that we think is extremely important would make Internet luring an offence. Internet luring as a separate offence is necessary because under the current provisions of the Criminal Code, it is required that there actually be something more than that.

In the case of dealing with someone on the Internet, I think we have all heard of cases where a police officer pretends to be a child in order to be lured into a meeting with a perpetrator. The police officer nabs the perpetrator and is able to charge that person because the person went to a hotel room or place where the person thought a child would be waiting.

•(1540)

These are complicated offences that require a great deal of police resources. They require some sort of a sting, as I discussed, in order to protect children, because children cannot actually be used as the bait for an offence like this. It would be unethical to do so. Therefore, it is difficult to prosecute these types of offences.

In effect, the new offences would be preventive in nature. Police would be able to intercept the types of Internet predators we see all

too frequently these days. They would be intercepted before they actually had a chance to make arrangements to meet with a child for sexual purposes. Sometimes it is called “grooming”, where the offender builds a relationship with a child and uses that relationship to take the next step. Criminologists and police officers refer to it as grooming a child for eventual predation. That itself would be an offence.

We believe that is something that ought to be put into law as quickly as possible. There is no requirement for any actual abuse. In fact, this step is normally a preliminary step to sexual offences against children that we see all too often. We want to protect children. The NDP is steadfast in wanting to see the law improved to ensure that children who are potential victims of sexual predators are protected.

People on the other side do not like to hear that because they want to be able to say that the NDP does not support any measures designed to protect children. It is the exact opposite. That is why this motion is being presented. We want this to be part of the bill. It is accepted and sought by many people across the country. There is virtual unanimity throughout the academic and legal communities regarding the necessity for this provision. As well, police officers and prosecutors want the tools to prevent these crimes. As a parent, I am most anxious to see this brought forward as well.

That is in contrast to a lot of the measures in the rest of the bill. This omnibus bill has been called many names and has been roundly criticized as being full of ideologically based measures by experts who have been to the committee already. The committee is studying this. We have already had three meetings. We have heard a number of witnesses. We have heard experts in children's law, the law on young offenders, criminologists and representatives of the Canadian Bar Association who have examined this bill and have said there are serious problems with it.

The short title of this bill is the “safe streets and communities act”, but experts have said that this bill will not make our streets safer, that the measures will increase crime, will lead to greater violent crime and a more unsafe society. That is directly contradictory to the bill's short title and supposed aims of the government. We hear from people that the measures in this bill will lead to longer sentences, more hardened criminals, and less rehabilitation. People will be more likely to reoffend. All those things are going to increase the likelihood of crime, which is the exact opposite of what is intended.

•(1545)

They have been tried in other countries. They have been tried in the United States. We have seen examples of states in the United States that have gone down this road of treating people, who are convicted of offences, with a great deal of severity. They have now come to realize that they have driven up their costs of incarceration enormously, to no greater safety of their communities.

Routine Proceedings

In fact, they are leading to greater crime. Many of these states in the United States are finding ways to change their policies to focus on prevention and rehabilitation and, in some cases, do a massive diversion such as in Texas where its drug courts have the universal appeal of all sides in its legislature there.

I spoke to the reporter who did the story on the prisons in Texas and the plan to divert people from courts to drug rehabilitation programs. He said they were there for several days and were looking around, and fully expected to have a program in which there would be defenders of the current system and opponents. They wanted to present both sides of the story.

It was surprising, to the producers and journalists undertaking the program that was on CBC a couple of weeks ago, that there was only one side of the debate. Everybody, including Republicans, Democrats, judges and police officers, agreed that this approach was costing a fortune. This was in Texas. We are talking about one of the hard line states of the southern U.S. when it comes to criminal justice. There was unanimity there among the political leadership that this was a good idea, that it was saving money, reducing crime with results.

These kinds of debates and questions are being raised in committee. I can assure members that these debates need to take place. There are debates about that aspect of the law. There are debates about the youth criminal justice provisions.

We had a renowned law professor from Queen's University, Nicholas Bala, who has been testifying before parliamentary committees for 20 years. His opinions, expertise, and articles are quoted by courts throughout the land, including the Supreme Court of Canada. He has told us that he supports some of the provisions and the changes to the Youth Criminal Justice Act because they are good measures.

However, he has made it very clear that some of these provisions would lead to a greater criminalization of individuals who come before the law under the Youth Criminal Justice Act and, in fact, would lead to greater criminality, more criminals, and less safe communities as a result of the changes that are being proposed in this legislation.

Members can be sure that this very complex so-called omnibus bill deserves to receive great scrutiny through the committees of this House and through the debates in this House for a fair bit of time, for as long as it needs, in order to do a proper job. It is a very complex bill.

On the issues of the relation to civil remedies for terrorism, we had a debate in committee on Tuesday this week. We had an individual who is part of a committee that is opposed to terrorism and an individual whose husband, sadly, was a victim of the 9/11 attack on the twin towers in New York, who testified, talking about the need for this legislation and the need to improve it.

These aspects have to be looked at in terms of what changes need to be made to make these bills effective and work. There needs to be the kind of debate that should take place.

We had the Canadian Bar Association come before us and say that there were serious problems with this bill. Some people like to

dismiss the Canadian Bar Association and say, "Oh, they're just defence lawyers". However, that is not the case. When the Canadian Bar Association came to testify before Parliament, it had a very lengthy presentation of over 100 pages and also an oral presentation. Its response was primarily the work of the Canadian Bar Association national criminal justice section which represents prosecutors and defence lawyers as well as legal academics from every part of Canada.

• (1550)

The Canadian Bar Association is not on one side or the other of a particular paradigm. Its body represents an analysis of this legislation based on the views of Crown prosecutors who prosecute offences throughout the country. It has brought together the views of prosecutors, defence counsel and legal academics throughout the country. Similarly, we had representations from the Barreau du Québec, as well. There were advocates on both sides of the justice divide, both prosecutors and defence counsel, very experienced and learned people who we should hear from.

I am also certain, based on the experience in the past of some of these constituent bills that are part of this, there will be significant debate within the Senate that will see this legislation not back to this House very soon. The plan of the government to have this passed in 100 days from when Parliament began to sit is very unlikely to be met.

What we want to do is put, in the hands of prosecutors and police officers, as soon as possible, the provisions that provide for protection of our children from sexual assaults, from Internet luring, from the use of pornography to groom or to involve children in sexual offences, which are most abhorrent to all citizens of this country. They ought to be given a priority and a special consideration by this House for speedy passage.

I will acknowledge that there are some aspects of the legislation which give me a little trouble. As a lawyer I have strong feelings about mandatory minimum sentences because it fetters the discretion of judges. In some cases the minimum sentences also become maximum sentences, and judges who might be inclined to give a strong sentence because of particular circumstances may be inclined to stick to the minimum mandatory sentence because it is prescribed by law. That is a point that we can debate fully. I have serious reservations about that.

However, for the sake of getting this matter into the hands of prosecutors and police officers for the protection of our children, we want to see this legislation separated out from the existing bill, and then brought before this House so that it can receive speedy passage and be out of here within a matter of days. It could then be sent to the other place and become law very shortly.

It is now near the end of October. I am certain this could be dealt with before the middle of November, and then be law before the end of November, before we break for Christmas. I think that is very likely and very possible.

Routine Proceedings

With the will of the government to co-operate on this particular motion, that could be done for the benefit of all Canadians, particularly for the benefit of the young people who will be protected and hopefully, potentially, saved from sexual assault and sexual abuse. How many? We do not know. It could be 5, 10, 100 or 200. There is an opportunity here to ensure that this bill is put into law as soon as possible.

The rest of the legislation is flawed. It has been called tough on crime, harsh, excessive, and unfair in some cases. Rather than replicating the errors of other places, we could learn from them. However, we cannot have that debate with this flawed bill.

This is an opportunity for this legislation because there is consensus in this House. It has passed before. It has gone through the Senate before. We think that it can pass very quickly. I do not imagine there would be a terrible amount of debate.

I would ask hon. members opposite to support this motion because it is timely, urgent, and can save children from sexual assault.

•(1555)

[Translation]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we move on to questions and comments, I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded division, government orders will be extended by nine minutes.

The hon. member for Mount Royal.

[English]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I support the member for St. John's East in his particular recommendation with regard to protection against sexual predators, particularly with regard to that piece of the omnibus bill.

However, I also want to refer to his generic concern that he also expressed, that the real problem here is that we have nine pieces of legislation bundled together in one omnibus bill, each of which deserves its own differentiated and separate treatment.

Indeed, we not only have an abbreviated time limitation debate in this chamber but we will necessarily have abbreviated debate in committee. The result will be that parliamentarians, particularly those who have been elected for the first time, will not have had an opportunity to debate these measures, some of which were in the previous sessions and previous parliaments and some of which were not, and even those that were, were never addressed by the new parliamentarians, nor did they have a chance to discuss it with their constituents. This raises a basic concern with regard to the parliamentary and democratic process, as a whole.

I want to recommend to the member for St. John's East that we unbundle the entire omnibus package and address each of those bills one by one, some of which I would also support, but the majority of which I cannot.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I agree with the member for Mount Royal. This whole process is seriously flawed.

Some of the bills that are now packaged in the omnibus bill were before this House and received amendments that were passed by this House. Those amendments do not even appear in these bills. It is

rather confusing. It is very frustrating, as well, to people presenting to the committee to know that there may not be time to fully debate these particular sections.

I agree with him that these should be unbundled. I certainly would welcome any motions that he might want to bring to separate out other parts of this legislation for separate debate. I chose this one because it is one that has received the largest amount of consensus and could be passed fairly quickly, and it would be sure to save children from sexual abuse and sexual assault.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for St. John's East for putting so clearly the number of things that we would like to see unbundled. Many members in the opposition parties want effective legislation to oppose criminal activity. However, we know that many sections of this bill fly in the face of evidence.

I would like to confirm our support for unbundling and also to support the hon. member for Mount Royal that it would be best to take each piece of this legislation piece by piece, so the good pieces could be passed expeditiously and we could improve those sections that need improving.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I know the government claims, on a daily basis, to have a strong mandate to do all sorts of things. I do not think it is right to say that it has a strong mandate to do all of the things that are listed here in this omnibus bill that, in fact, experts tell us are going to lead to greater violent crime and less safe communities without having an opportunity for full discussion. We are not talking about people coming up with this just to delay matters. They are coming up with it because they have experience, they have understanding, and they have the knowledge to make predictions based on evidence as to what this bill would do.

I thank the member for her support and would welcome her to bring forward motions of a similar nature to see if we can unbundle the bill.

•(1600)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, I was at church on Sunday. My congregation had a petition out front on this topic, so I will be presenting that at some point in the future, calling on this Parliament to do more to protect our children. I hear that complaint a lot.

This part of Bill C-10 is one of the few times I have seen the government, since it has been in power, actually take an approach that is preventative, in particular, with regard to the new crimes that we are creating of luring and grooming.

Routine Proceedings

I have to say with some pride that those sections, those proposed amendments to the Criminal Code, first surfaced in this Parliament in the form of private members' bills from the NDP, back as early as 1995, 1998, somewhere in that time period. Liberals never did anything about it and until we finally saw this bill about a year and a half ago, the government did.

I would ask my colleague from St. John's East this question. What does he see as being the greatest advantage, in terms of protecting our children, with regard to those two sections, in particular?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for pointing that out. The preventive aspect of this is key. I say that as someone who, unfortunately, has had considerable experience in dealing with victims of assault and sexual abuse as a legal counsel throughout most of the nineties. This does enormous damage to individuals' lives, to their prospects and to their mental health.

Preventing sexual abuse and sexual assault is a magnificent goal and one that would achieve tremendous results. I urge hon. members opposite to help us do that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully to all the questions and the speech made by my colleague from St. John's East. I am a member of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, which is currently studying Bill C-10 for the first time. It is a very large bill. We hear from a ton of witnesses every time we study it. I think that the hon. member for Mount Royal mentioned that earlier. I am one of the members who is hearing these things for the first time. We must make it easier to hear from the various witnesses.

Just to give you an idea: when I look at our schedule for tomorrow, I see that over the course of one hour we will have the Canadian Council of Criminal Defence Lawyers, the Canadian Centre for Abuse Awareness, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and also Joanne Jong, as an individual. All of that will take place over the course of one hour. Each person or group is given five minutes. Every issue related to Bill C-10 is very important.

There is near-unanimity in the House on one of these issues. Perhaps the member for St. John's East could repeat what he said, but I find it difficult to understand why the government is being stubborn about splitting a matter that has unanimous support, where progress could be made.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, as a member of the committee, I do sympathize very much.

We have had proposals from numerous witnesses. A renowned criminologist, Irvin Waller, proposed a crime prevention board for Canada. That is a worthy topic for consideration because it is in all of our interests to find ways to prevent crimes, to avoid victimhood and to have safer streets. He said that there should be a mechanism in place to focus on crime prevention. We would have less victims and safer communities. We could monitor the work that is already being done. That is something that deserves consideration but it cannot be done quickly.

What can be done quickly is to provide something that will make prevention more readily possible and save innocent people from becoming victims of sexual assault. That type of legislation could get to the other place quickly and could be adopted quickly by the House. It is a tool that we could put in the hands of prosecutors and police throughout this country.

•(1605)

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, it is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Windsor West, Public Safety.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, I can assure you and members of the House that my remarks will be brief.

I want to point out to all members of the House and anyone from the viewing public who may be watching that we are now scheduled to be speaking to Bill C-19, a bill brought forward by this government to repeal the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. Instead, we have a frivolous motion brought forward by a member of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition.

I would point out that I find it richly ironic that members of the opposition consistently have stated over the past few weeks that our government is limiting debate on important issues and yet, today, when we were to enter into debate on an issue that has gripped the House for many years, the opposition has chosen to use a procedural manoeuvre to limit and stifle debate. Whenever opposition members stand in this place and accuse our government of limiting debate, I will point to this day.

I would also point out to the House that we have no recourse but to deal with the same procedural manoeuvres that they are trying to get back to debating the issues of the day. Therefore, I move:

That the House do now proceed to the orders of the day.

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The previous speaker misinformed the House. This motion was on the order paper before the bill was even tabled, and to call it reactionary and frivolous is dead wrong.

The Deputy Speaker: I believe the motion is in order.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

Routine Proceedings

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1650)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 46*)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Block	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Brunooge
Butt	Calandra
Calkins	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Daniel	Davidson
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Gill
Goguen	Goldring
Goodyear	Gosal
Gourde	Grewal
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hayes	Hiltz
Hoepner	Holder
James	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Mayes	McColeman
Menegakis	Menzies
Merrifield	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	O'Connor
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Obhrai
Norlock	Oliver
O'Neill Gordon	Paradis
Oda	Penashue
Opitz	Preston
Payne	Rathgeber
Poilievre	Rempel
Raitt	Richardson
Reid	Saxton
Richards	Scha
Ritz	Smith
Schellenberger	
Shipley	

Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Tilson	Toet
Toews	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Uppal
Valcourt	Van Loan
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wilks	Wong
Woodworth	Yelich
Young (Vancouver South)	Zimmer— 148

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Chow	Christopherson
Cleary	Coderre
Comartin	Côté
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)
Day	Dionne Labeille
Donnelly	Doré Lefebvre
Dubé	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dusseault	Easter
Eyking	Foote
Fortin	Freeman
Fry	Garnneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Joudain	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellaway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse
Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Éémard)
Liu	MacAulay
Masse	Mathyssen
May	McCallum
McGuinity	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Michaud	Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Paccetti
Papillon	Patry
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Quach	Rac
Rafferty	Raynault
Regan	Roussau
Sandhu	Sellah
Sgro	Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Wind-
sor)	Sitsabaisan
Sims (Newton—North Delta)	Stewart
St-Denis	Sullivan
Stoffer	Toope
Thibeault	Turmel
Tremblay	
Valeriote— 121	

Government Orders

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC) moved that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to begin debate on Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

This is a great day for Conservatives across Canada. It marks the beginning of the end for a nearly 17-year-old legacy of waste thrust upon Canadians by the previous Liberal government. I know I speak for many of my colleagues when I say that this has been a very long time in coming. For years, many of us have stood in this place even when we were on the other side and took a stand for law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters.

We repeated time and again that the long gun registry was wasteful. It was ineffective. It did nothing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Yet still the parties that now form the opposition stood against us and against the law-abiding Canadians for whom we were standing.

It is true that occasionally we found allies across the aisle as long as they could be assured that their vote against the registry would not actually result in the registry being dismantled. Those individuals ended up listening to their Ottawa bosses rather than standing up for the voices of their constituents. However, we are here today to look forward, not back.

On May 2, Canadians gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and this is exactly what we are doing.

I would like to take a moment to discuss that mandate. From personal experience, I have received literally thousands of phone calls and letters advocating a quick end to the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. I know from talking to my colleagues that they have had similar experiences.

Conservative candidates from across Canada stood at doorsteps and spoke to their constituents. Time after time they heard people say “When are you going to end the long gun registry?” Specifically, the members for Yukon, Nipissing—Timiskaming, Sault Ste. Marie and Ajax—Pickering heard from their constituents how important it was to elect a member of Parliament who stood against the wasteful long gun registry.

There have been many discussions over what the bill would do and what it would not do. What it would do is ensure that law-abiding hunters, farmers and sports shooters would no longer be treated like criminals simply because they owned a rifle or a shotgun. What the bill would not do is eliminate effective gun control.

The fact is, and this is no secret, the Conservative government is committed to keeping our streets and communities safe. We have brought in measures to do just that. Specifically, we have brought in mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes and targeted those who engage in dangerous criminal activity such as drive-by shootings. We have also funded numerous programs through the national crime prevention strategy that helps stop gun crime before it happens. That is how we keep Canadians safe, through tough and effective laws and smart prevention programs, not through needlessly increasing red tape and targeting law-abiding Canadians.

The bill would also provide for the destruction of records held by the Government of Canada relating to the registration of long guns and it would only make sense. If we are getting rid of the registry, we get rid of the registry. The registry is comprised of information. We are getting rid of that registry.

The reason for this is the simple fact that we do not want to assist anyone to set up a back door registry. As we heard from the NDP members during question period, they have clearly indicated that they will reimpose a long gun registry should they ever have the opportunity to enter into a coalition with the Liberals on that fact.

The reason for this being unacceptable is that it focuses on law-abiding Canadians who should not have been targeted. This information should never have been collected in the first place. To maintain the registry and the information is a complete violation of law and the principles of privacy that all of us in the House respect.

• (1655)

I would like to bring this back down to a fundamental truth. In rural Canada oftentimes long guns are simply a part of everyday life. Whether it is owning hunting rifles for sport or using a shotgun as an everyday tool on the farm to protect their crops or livestock, there are a plethora of reasons that law-abiding Canadians would own long guns.

As we have said consistently, long guns are not the weapon of choice for criminals. Primarily criminals use hand guns or other restricted or prohibited firearms, the registration requirement of which is not affected by the bill here today. I would like to emphasize that.

The current system imposed by the previous Liberal government and supported by the NDP opposition is blissfully ignorant of this fundamental fact. The justice minister who ushered in this proposal, Allan Rock even went so far as to state that it was his firm belief that the only people in Canada who should have firearms are police officers and the military. That is a frightening statement and our government completely disagrees with this premise.

Frankly, the fact is there is no evidence that the long gun registry has prevented a single crime in Canada. Let us think logically about this for a moment. Is it reasonable to assume that thugs and criminals who have no problem committing armed robbery or other serious offences with firearms will sit down and fill out the paperwork? The response is obvious and it is a resounding no.

Government Orders

Rather than preventing criminals, the long gun registry has actually created criminals. The opposition has frequently used the analogy of registering cars and boats or other everyday items. This is simply not an accurate analogy. If people let their car registration lapse, they do not contravene the Criminal Code. They do not receive a criminal record. More important, they do not face the prospect of serious jail time. This is the case with the long gun registry. Again, reasonable people find this unacceptable.

As I stated earlier, one of our government's main priorities is keeping our streets and communities safe. I note the Canadian Police Association just came out with a statement saying that our government has received a mandate from the people on May 2 and that it is moving past the issue of the long gun registry. It wants to work with us on issues like the ingredients of Bill C-10 and the lawful access legislation. We, in fact, are committed to working with the police in that respect.

Some proponents of the long gun registry maintain that eliminating it will cause anarchy. This, again, is simply hyperbole and is not the case.

First and foremost, all individuals will still be required to be licensed to possess a firearm. We are committed to ensuring that only responsible and qualified individuals own firearms. Even after the passage of Bill C-19, to obtain a licence, individuals must still be able to pass the required Canadian firearms safety course and comply with safe storage and transportation requirements. They will also need to pass a background check, including a review of the individual's criminal record, any history of treatment for mental illness associated with violence, or history of violent behaviour against other people.

There will still be proper controls over restricted and prohibited firearms. We will continue to ensure that they are registered, as we have for many years.

In essence, Bill C-19 retains licensing requirements for all gun owners, while doing away with the need for honest, law-abiding citizens to register their non-restricted rifles or shotguns, a requirement that is unfair and ineffective. Let us be clear. Canadian firearms owners are law-abiding members of our society and deserve to be treated as such. Burdening these citizens with unnecessary red tape and bureaucracy at the risk of a criminal record is not only unreasonable, it is unfair and it is wrong.

• (1700)

The NDP members said they had a solution. They said they would not make it a criminal record but rather an offence. If it is no longer a criminal record it is then outside the area of criminal law which makes it unconstitutional. Although they realized that the bill would be unconstitutional, they were trying to foist it on Canadians in order to save this unfair and unreasonable legislation.

We have heard loud and clear from Canadians who own long guns that they want the long gun registry eliminated. They want to ensure that their private information is not distributed to others. That is what is proposed under Bill C-19.

We are not proposing a fundamental overhaul or scrapping of the entire licensing or registration system. Rather, we are proposing changes that do away with the need to register legally acquired or

used rifles and shotguns, many of which are owned by Canadians living in rural or remote areas. Put simply, we are scrapping the long gun registry just as we said we would do.

We need a system with effective measures in place to keep guns out of the hands of criminals, not law-abiding hunters, farmers or sport shooters. That means we need to put more police on our streets. The government has acted on that. That also means our laws must be tough and effective. Again, the government has acted on that. The government is determined to ensure that law-abiding citizens are treated fairly while it is combatting the criminal use of firearms and getting tough on crime.

The bill before us today is about making sure that we invest in initiatives that work. It is about making sure we continue to protect the safety and security of Canadians without punishing people unnecessarily because of where they live or how they make a living.

We must ask ourselves how laws that penalize law-abiding citizens on farms or in the north can help reduce gun crimes in Montreal, Toronto, Winnipeg or Vancouver. The answer is clear: they do not.

When we hear statements made by members of the NDP, such as "Guns gotta go, folks. I'm for a full-out ban on these things" from the member for Davenport or "To destroy the gun registry is to destroy lives" from the NDP leadership contestant from Outremont, it is clear that there is a fundamental misunderstanding of the issues at play in a country like Canada.

I will also touch on the issue of cost. When the idea of registering long guns was first discussed, the Liberals said it would be a simple process and would cost no more than \$2 million. I remember Allan Rock coming into my office when I was the attorney general of Manitoba telling me that Manitoba must enforce the long gun registry. I told him that Manitoba would not enforce the long gun registry because it was a bottomless pit and that it was a law the federal government would have to enforce. He threatened to sue me.

Allan Rock is long gone and the lawsuit never materialized. Unfortunately, the effects of what Allan Rock and the Liberals did, which is now supported fully by the NDP, continues on. That is no understatement. The CBC, the state broadcaster, reported that the costs have ballooned to over \$2 billion. That is unacceptable.

From 1995 to 2011, the money was spent on a program that did not save one life. Imagine how many police officers that money could have paid for or how many crime prevention programs it could have funded. The legacy of waste is shameful. I am proud to be part of the Conservative government that is putting an end to this wasteful and ineffective boondoggle.

As my time for debate is coming to an end I will sum up my arguments as to why all members should support this important legislation.

Government Orders

First, the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry does not do a single thing to keep guns out of the hands of criminals. Front-line police officers, notably with the Canadian Police Association, agree with the government that the best approach to combatting gun crime is to ensure tough and effective sentences.

• (1705)

Second, the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry targets law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters. Those people who own guns as a part of their rural way of life or simply as firearms enthusiasts are treated like criminals because of this unbalanced policy. As a government and as a country we must ensure that the measures we take on important public safety issues are effective.

Third, the costs associated with this program are inexcusable. Two billion dollars to implement a policy that does not do a whit to protect Canadians is unacceptable and must not continue.

Most important, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. Canadians expect no less of us than to implement this key plank of our platform without delay.

As I stated earlier, several former Liberal and NDP members are no longer in this place because they listened to their Ottawa bosses instead of their constituents.

I call on all members opposite to listen to Canadians and pass this important legislation quickly.

I will specifically mention the members for Timmins—James Bay, Welland, Sackville—Eastern Shore, Sudbury, Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, Nickel Belt, Malpeque, Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor and Avalon. They promised their constituents that they would oppose the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. I hope they will live up to their word.

I will reiterate the fact that Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. That is exactly what the bill will do.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, we know when the government was elected in 2006, having campaigned on the same issue that it campaigned on in the last election, that for five years it did nothing to fix the problems of the registry or bring forth legislation such as that which is before us today.

When the private members' bills that were stalking horses for the government's legislative intent were brought forward, both in the House and in the Senate, greater measures were included to actually protect and maintain information on the sale of guns by businesses, whose records had to be kept. Also, when a gun was being transferred, the individual transferring the gun had to notify the administrators of the registry and ensure that the individual to whom the gun was being transferred was in fact licensed to own a gun. These measures are absent from the bill.

Also contained in the bill, which was not in any of the others, is the destruction of records. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police specifically asked the minister in a letter to keep those records and make the information available to its police forces in an effort to help save lives and trace guns. I have a copy of that letter, dated May 19.

Why is the minister bringing in legislation that, in addition to abolishing the long gun registry, is weakening gun control protection in Canada as well as destroying valuable records which the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has begged the minister to keep for use as a tool to help save lives?

• (1710)

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, it is difficult for me to point out all of the inconsistencies in the arguments made by my colleague across the way.

Let me start with the simple premise that he said that the government did nothing and in the same breath said there was all kinds of stalking horse legislation brought forward by the government. That is the kind of duplicity we can expect from the NDP on this matter, which we see on a continual basis.

With respect to the destruction of information, let us be clear. We are getting rid of the long gun registry. What is the long gun registry? The long gun registry is a database of information.

The member across the way is saying that we should tell the Canadian people that we will get rid of the long gun registry but not really do it. That is what the NDP members are prepared to support. That is exactly the kind of hypocrisy that Canadians have had enough of.

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Madam Speaker, today is an extremely sad day for Canada. I cannot help but think about the victims at Dawson College and the École Polytechnique. We could make all sorts of personal attacks, apply all kinds of labels and use the minister's rhetoric, but the reality is that there is information that the provinces want to use. The National Assembly spoke out today. The Government of Quebec said that it wants to have this information. The Conservative government is partisan and unable to do its job. We know that police officers use the registry and that it is an important prevention tool. They want this information so that they, at least in Quebec, can create their own gun registry.

Why is the government so determined to keep this information to itself? Is it because it is an ideological party that flagrantly ignores the facts and wants to do things its way? Why will it not give this information to Quebec? Taxpayers paid \$250 million for it. It is not the government's registry; it belongs to Canadians.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I do not know how I can make this any clearer. Our government indicated that we would get rid of the long gun registry. The registry is nothing more than a database of information containing the personal and private facts of law-abiding Canadian citizens. We said we would get rid of it. That is our commitment to the Canadian people. That is exactly what we are doing.

I do not understand what the member meant when he said that we promise the Canadian people one thing and then allow it to happen through the back door. Quite frankly, we are not prepared to break faith with the Canadian people with respect to that issue.

Points of Order

The Canadian Police Association recognizes that our government received a mandate from the Canadian people on this particular issue. It wants us to get Bill C-10 and the lawful access legislation passed, which will make a difference in fighting crime.

• (1715)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC):

Madam Speaker, we have heard from the opposition that it wants to reconstruct this registry if given half the chance.

I want confirmation that all records, copies and backups of the registry will be destroyed. As well, I want to know when that will be done.

Also, I ask the minister, do the people who are receiving renewal notices in the mail have to complete them in order to be compliant?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, as the member is aware, when we formed government in 2006 we granted amnesty with respect to the long gun registry through regulation. As far as I am aware, that amnesty is still in effect.

With regard to the information, the legislation states clearly that it must be destroyed. Any agency that has that documentation must destroy it, otherwise it would be in breach of the law.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, on that note, I wonder how the Minister of Public Safety would respond to the Quebec government, which said today that it intends to challenge Parliament's legislation concerning the destruction of information, as stipulated in clause 29 of the bill. Quebec fully intends to maintain the register in question at the provincial level.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, the information was created under a specific piece of legislation. That legislation is being repealed. It would be unlawful for the information that was collected to remain in the hands of individuals after the legislation is repealed. We expect all law-abiding Canadians and agencies to follow the law.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, we all know that criminals do not register their weapons. This has been an ineffective tool, if it is a tool at all.

Perhaps the minister could elaborate on how much money has gone into this registry that is really not providing any real service to Canadians.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, as I indicated in my comments, the state broadcaster CBC stated that the cost was about \$2 billion. There is no evidence of that expenditure ever having saved one life.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, the minister spoke several times about how inexpensive this program was. We know what was wasted when the program was set up. However, the RCMP says that it costs \$4 million a year to operate the long gun registry part of the gun control program.

Could the minister comment on that?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, as I understand it, the Auditor General indicated a few years ago that the cost was approximately \$70 million. I do not believe that the direct costs are that high. The direct cost of the long gun and short arms restricted firearms registry would be somewhere in the range of \$22 million a year, and most of

the guns registered are long guns. However, this does not take into account all of the indirect policing costs that are passed on to the federal, provincial and municipal agencies. Perhaps that is where the Auditor General took the larger figure from.

* * *

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-317—INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is a continuation of an argument on a point of order that I raised last Tuesday and which was responded to by the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale yesterday. The point of order I raised at that time was with regard to Bill C-317. It is an act to amend the Income Tax Act as it affects labour organizations in this country.

When I raised the point of order, I asked the Speaker at the time that he rule that the proceedings to date under Bill C-317, standing in the name of the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, that the introduction and first reading has not respected the provisions of our Standing Orders and is therefore null and void, and that he direct that the order for second reading of Bill C-317 be discharged and the bill be withdrawn from the order paper.

I will summarize that quickly. What I was asking for and continue to ask for is a ruling that the bill, in effect, is improperly before the House and should not even have made to this stage, so we should be taking it off the order paper and not allow it to proceed into the future.

My objections to the bill were laid out on the grounds that the bill would have the effect of creating taxpayers where ones did not exist before.

This, of course, is the sole prerogative of the ministers of the Crown and cannot be done through private members' business.

The attempt here, by doing it through a private member's bill, is clearly contrary to all sorts of precedents where governments, when they are doing this, do it through the form of a government bill, a ways and means motions and a budget bill.

In his remarks, the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale attempted to discredit the arguments that I presented on October 18.

Points of Order

Over many years in the legal field and in the courts of this country, I came to recognize that type of argument, that type of case presented by an opponent counsel. It always represents the last gasp of a lost argument, which is what we saw yesterday. It was a bit disturbing. I felt that he had misrepresented and, in one case, actually misquoted my words, attributing words to me that I did not say. He also ignored my most substantial argument. Finally, he held on for dear life to the straws of a paraphrased reference while ignoring the actual precedent on which the reference was based.

Madam Speaker, if you go back and look at my original argument, you will see the distinction I was making in that regard.

In his brief remarks he said:

My colleague also raised the issue of my bill creating a "new class of taxpayer". According to the Income Tax Act....

He said that was what I said. He went on from there and spent the next 276 words of his response critiquing my apparent reference to the creation of a new class of taxpayers, as though it were the crux of my argument, which it was not at all.

Unfortunately, the member opposite attributed to me that I used the word "class" only one time. He repeated it I do not know how many times in his argument. I used the word only once. When I used that word, he appeared to have completely lost that context that was coming forth or he ignored it. I used it to point out that the guideline for determining whether or not a ways and means motion was necessary, and I was quoting from the *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition at page 900 where it uses the words, "extension of a tax to a new class of taxpayer".

The root of that reference is Beauchesne, not me, who does not use the words "class of taxpayer" at all. In quoting me in such a way would be a similar way of me saying that he agreed with my case where, in a fragment of one of his sentences he said, "It is accepted that the bill may have the effect claimed by my colleague". That is the kind of argument he was making. It was completely out of context and it was quite erroneous of the argument I was placing before the Speaker on October 18.

• (1720)

Such a selective use of quotes would be irresponsible and misleading, as it was when my colleague opposite did so yesterday.

Madam Speaker, while clearly lost on the member opposite, I am confident that you will see the marked difference between the paraphrasing he used for my argument, "a class of taxpayer", and the actual reference from Beauchesne's, which states, "an extension of the incidence of a tax so as to include persons not already payers". The difference between them may seem negligible but, in this case, it means the difference between it being eligible for a private member's bill or being required to be brought forth by way of a ways and means motion by the government of the day and, therefore, ineligible for a private member's bill.

The member went on in his remarks to counter my assertion that a member of a labour organization's dues were actually discretionary. This one actually blew me away in the sense of the level of lack of knowledge on the part of the member. He was arguing that the fees that union members pay were akin to the contributions one makes to a charitable organization. They are not.

I know very well that union members are required by the laws of this country, if they are represented by a union, to pay union dues. This came out of the Rand Formula, which came out of the city of Windsor as a result of a Ford strike back in 1946. It was a long fight. It is very much a major part of the history of this country. Mr. Justice Rand at that time was appointed to deal with it. He created the Rand Formula, which makes it mandatory for members of unions to pay dues. It is not a choice.

This was what he said, and it blew me away. He said:

—union members whose union has lost its tax exempt status for refusing to disclose have the right to exercise certain options. Those options include the option to be represented by another union....

That is totally false. It is not how the labour relations system in this country functions at all. An individual union member cannot just go across the street and tell another union that he or she now wants to be a member of that union and ask that it represent him or her. It does not work that way. The argument is really at the level of being preposterous.

Labour unions or organizations are democratically elected by their members. It is very similar to a government in that respect. There is a formal election process. I wonder if the member would feel that the taxes citizens pay to the federal government are discretionary in this sense as well. The answer to that is obvious: it is not at all discretionary. It is not discretionary for people to pay their taxes and it is not discretionary for people to pay their union dues.

As I said, after his remarks yesterday, his efforts to discredit my remarks had virtually no substance and my argument today confirms that. There was one exception to that and that was his contention that his bill did not actually change the tax rules. This was basically a new point that he had raised. I will summarize what he said. He said that it made the provisions of financial disclosure that must be followed that much more stringent, so it was not changing things. I disagree strongly with that interpretation, but the argument got me thinking about what door we would be opening if in fact, Madam Speaker, you found that line of argument persuasive

I will now take this idea close to the limits of its application. There are provisions in the Income Tax Act that, if broken, revoke the tax benefits of businesses, charities or non-profits, just like the one dealt with in this bill. The member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale asserts that no ways and means motion is required for amending the rules which would trigger the loss of those benefits.

Just last month, in September, the government adjusted some of the tax benefit rules in its second budget implementation act, specifically the rules around the business partnerships that allow taxes to be deferred within the partnership arrangements. In fact, what happened with regard to that change in benefits was that the government tabled a ways and means motion ahead of the bill being presented. That is what is required in that circumstance. It is what is required in the circumstances that we are dealing with in Bill C-317.

• (1725)

I do not want to be extreme in my examples regarding the ability to allow this type of an amendment. However, we have to look at the door that we would potentially open here. I say that from this vantage point.

Government Orders

A few years ago, as part of the G8 preparatory meetings, I happened to be in Russia and in the course of the meetings we met with a number of human rights groups, set up by our embassy there. Human rights groups were showing the leadership of that country, at that time, taking extreme measures, and I equate that to some degree with what we are seeing here. We are certainly away ahead of where this bill would be, but it is along the same slippery slope.

What Russia was doing was imposing such onerous requirements on the human rights groups to report and report that even large organizations were having to spend anywhere from 25% to 50% of their human resources and budgets on this reporting function. It made it virtually impossible for them to continue to function. The law was just coming into effect at that point, but since then a number of the organizations have collapsed under the weight of that kind of rule.

We could see the same thing happening if we continue to go down this route, where we have private members' bills coming forward, in one of the examples I used, that require a human rights non-profit group or union to have a transcript of every phone call or communication made by an employee of the organization and that information had to be provided to the government.

That was the kind of thing being done in the Russian legal system to, in effect, thwart the good work that a number of those human rights agencies were doing. That is the kind of thing we could be seeing, in any number of sectors, where that kind of an approach would have the effect of either significantly encumbering the operation of the organization or, in fact, putting it out of business.

To some degree, that is a problem with this bill. The requirements of this bill are so onerous, especially to small local unions of, say, 100 or 150 members in the local community. They would be required to do so much to comply with this bill that they could be put out of business, leaving their membership with no representation.

Mr. Jack Harris: And they talk about red tape reduction.

Mr. Joe Comartin: My colleague from St. John's mentions that the government always talks about red tape reduction, when in fact in this case it is just piling it on for ideological reasons in its ongoing attack against the labour movement in this country.

Let me conclude with these few remarks. This precedent with Bill C-317, for all intents and purposes, allows private members' bills to increase taxes on entities that are covered by these income tax laws by putting a hair trigger on those requirements. That is exactly what is happening here.

It goes contrary to the spirit and the letter, I believe, of the Standing Orders of this place. I am confident that once you, Madam Speaker, have reviewed all the arguments you will agree.

I once again renew my request to the Chair that what has happened up to this point with regard to Bill C-317 be dismissed from the record of this House and that Bill C-317 be found to be out of order, and not allowed to proceed on to second reading.

Bill C-317 is currently scheduled for the first hour of debate as a private member's bill on November 4, so it will be necessary for the Chair to give us a ruling on this before that date.

• (1730)

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for his intervention and that information will also be considered by the Speaker in the decision on this bill.

The hon. government House leader.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, first, on the same point of order, I note that the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale may wish to address some of the points raised by my friend, the opposition House leader, and we will advise whether he wishes such an opportunity to do so.

* * *

• (1735)

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

BILL C-19 — NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Madam Speaker, on another matter, I would like to advise that with regard to Standing Orders 78(1) and 78(2), an agreement has not been reached under those provisions with respect to the second reading stage of Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the Crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at said stage.

I want to advise the House that it is my intention to allot three further days of debate, which would bring the total to four sitting days, including today. Following second reading debate, the bill would be referred to a committee for detailed study of this measure which will cease to treat farmers and outdoor enthusiasts like criminals.

On May 2, Canadians, including the good people of Yukon, Labrador, Madawaska—Restigouche, Nipissing—Timiskaming and Sault Ste. Marie, gave our government a strong mandate to follow through on our commitments. Our government has been clear that we will end, once and for all, the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

SECOND READING

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am rising to speak at second reading on Bill C-19.

We have a bill from a government that has spent at least the last five years using the whole notion of the firearms registry to divide Canadians, to bring about a division between urban and rural Canadians, between aboriginal Canadians and the rest, and between men and women.

Private Members' Business

Even in rural areas, where the government claims a great deal of opposition to this legislation, we find women being supportive of this legislation. In fact, even women whose husbands and family members may possess long guns in their houses are supportive of strong measures of gun control because of the importance to their personal safety.

What we are seeing happening is that all of the problems that existed could have been addressed by the government over the last five years in a co-operative method of bringing people together instead of showing how they could be divided, as the government has done.

Our party has done a tremendous amount of work trying to bring about measures and bring forward suggestions and ideas that would bring people together. If I may, before I finish today, read a quote from our leader, Jack Layton, on the issue from August 2010. He said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians...[The Conservatives are] stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest. [The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing" stand-down.

This is un-Canadian. This kind of divisiveness, pitting one group against another is the poisonous politics of the United States. Not the nation-building politics of Canada.

I want to ask members of this House and Canadians to reflect on the words of our late leader, Jack Layton, who talked about bringing people together to find solutions that help us stop gun violence in our country. It is a priority for both urban and rural Canadians.

We learned today from Statistics Canada that, happily, the homicide rate in Canada is now at the lowest that it has been in 45 years, and that is a good thing. We do not want to do anything to change that.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for St. John's East will have 16 minutes remaining for his speech when the House next resumes debate on the motion and also 10 minutes for questions and comments.

It being 5:39 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

NATIONAL PUBLIC TRANSIT STRATEGY ACT

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP) moved that Bill C-305, An Act to establish a National Public Transit Strategy, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today millions of Canadians were left behind. They were stuck in traffic or they just could not squeeze into

the subway car, or the bus was full and did not stop for them. The millions of Canadians who were left behind were on their way to work, to school, to shop, to play, or to take care of their families.

[*Translation*]

Millions of people across Canada have been left behind: in big cities like Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, as well as in small towns and villages.

[*English*]

Millions of people were left behind because Canada is falling behind on public transit. We are falling behind the rest of the world. All other G8 countries have a national transit plan, not Canada. Most have predictable capital funding, not Canada. Most have transit-related research and development funding, not Canada. Most have recognized the essential importance of transit in this day and age as a national priority, not Canada. We are failing behind. We are failing to invest where it counts and it is costing us dearly.

In 2006, five years ago, traffic congestion in the Toronto and Hamilton areas alone cost \$6 billion in lost productivity; \$6 billion five years ago and the congestion is much worse now than it was ever before. Canadian cities are now among the worst in the world.

Add to those costs the cost of traffic accidents, wasted fuel and lost opportunities. Billions and billions of dollars every year go up in smoke with nothing to show for it but bad air and road rage. Those are a lot of bucks. We can do better. We must do better. What is required is resolve and leadership.

With the national transit strategy set forth in this bill we have the chance to show that leadership and move Canada forward. If we do so we will have a positive impact on the lives of all Canadians. There is an urgent need for national leadership, so let us not miss the bus this time. Let us not pass the buck and say that public transit is not the jurisdiction of the federal government. Let us take the lead.

Here are some wise words on jurisdiction: "The national transit strategy would mean the leadership to align a common vision and the opportunity for all three levels of government to work together and define the roles, responsibilities and priorities of each jurisdiction". Those are not my words. They are not words from the NDP. They are not the words of a federal politician. Those are the words of Her Worship Hazel McCallion, the legendary mayor of Mississauga. Those words were in a letter she wrote to me a few weeks ago in support of this national transit strategy bill.

It is interesting that Hazel McCallion was just ranked number one in a Canadian poll as the most popular mayor. Naheed Nenshi, the mayor of Calgary, is number two. He is the Prime Minister's mayor and he supports a national transit strategy. Gregor Robertson, the mayor of Vancouver, is number three and he too supports a national transit strategy. These mayors are all in touch with their constituents. They all know what is needed.

Here are some more words: "We would encourage all parliamentarians and all parties to support the creation of a national transit strategy" They are not the words of a big city mayor. They are the words of the mayor of Grande Prairie.

Private Members' Business

The mayor of Winnipeg said that this provides an excellent framework for a national transit strategy. He was talking about the bill.

On the east coast, the Charlottetown city council supports the bill for a national transit strategy. That endorsement is echoed in all parts of the country, the transit authorities of London, Ottawa, Kelowna, the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, the Alberta Association of Municipal Districts and Counties, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities which represent over 2,000 cities large and small, from coast to coast to coast.

•(1745)

Business groups such as the Toronto Board of Trade, and just today, the Victoria Chamber of Commerce, are on board.

There is a reason that all these great community leaders, business groups and ordinary Canadians are crying out for us to act. Transit is important; in fact, it is vital.

It is hard to imagine anything else that could touch the lives of so many Canadians in so many positive ways in every part of our vast country every single day in every season of the year. People going to work are affected every day, as are students going to university, parents trying to get to the daycare centre before it closes, seniors going shopping or to a doctor's appointment, as well as teenagers going to a movie or a hockey game.

Here are some good words that every member of the House should hear:

Investments in urban transportation help ensure the efficient movement of goods and people, thereby strengthening the economy, reducing traffic congestion, greenhouse gas emissions and air pollution and improving the quality of life of Canadians.

Those words sum it up in a nutshell. I could not have said it better myself. I am sure that every member of the government would agree because those words are the very words of the government. They are on the Transport Canada website and have been for over a year. I think we all agree that public transit is critical. That is why we must proceed with a national transit strategy.

We had an opportunity to move forward in the last Parliament. My colleague, the hon. member for Victoria, introduced Bill C-466. That bill would have provided tax incentives to employers to support green commuting by their employees, not just by bus, streetcar or subway, but by bike and on foot. It would have achieved more than the current transit tax credit would, and would have cost less. It was supported by environmental groups and municipal politicians, but the government did not get it done. If we proceed with a national transit strategy, we should be able to revisit this forward-looking approach once again as part of a national solution.

Canada has been left behind, but let us not miss the bus again. Let us not pass the buck. Let us not say that it is not our jurisdiction. A national vision is our jurisdiction. National leadership is certainly our jurisdiction and our responsibility. Municipalities are looking to us for help, as is every Canadian who is sitting in traffic or has just missed the bus. Canadians need more than words, they need action and leadership from this House.

It is not just a question of money. Major investment funds are needed, of course. We have a huge shortfall in what is required for transit capital funds, but we need more than money. We need a strategy to ensure a consistent, reliable, predictable, long-term plan and accountability rather than a piecemeal approach. That is what we need to ensure fast, reliable, accessible and affordable public transit in and between cities and communities large and small, east and west, south and north.

Without a strategy that is hammered out and agreed upon by different levels of government, capital funds are often driven by political considerations and do not achieve long-term national goals. Which transit lines are worthy of support? Why choose subway lines rather than streetcar lines when streetcar lines are cheaper? Why are there buses to one town but not to another town of the same size? Should the number of buses be based on current riders, or on population and potential riders?

We need co-operation, transparency and accountability to ensure that we deliver on our goals. It is a national issue and we need a national solution to a growing national crisis.

[*Translation*]

Let us find solutions to address the public transit crisis that is affecting the entire country, and use this as an opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of all Canadians.

•(1750)

[*English*]

This should be a priority for every part of the government, every department and minister, because moving Canada forward with public transit is so important.

Considering the implications for the government and Parliament, clearly a national transit strategy would have a major impact on achieving the goals of the Minister of Transport and Infrastructure. Nothing could give more bang for the buck, so let us not pass the buck.

Think of all the goals of every government department.

For the Minister of Finance, there would clearly be a major impact on the economy, on growth, on mobility, and on the productivity of the workforce, as well as on the livability and competitiveness of our cities.

Think of the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development. Mobility of the workforce is a vital goal for them.

The government has made law enforcement a priority. Think what could be achieved by moving forward on transit. There would be fewer traffic accidents, less drunk driving by teenagers, less road rage, the ability for emergency vehicles to get around, fewer muggings, better public safety. Think, for example, of the positive impact of reliable, affordable public transit for a woman going home after a night shift. Think about how many lives we can enhance.

Private Members' Business

For the Minister of the Environment, a central focus on public transit would help us meet our international commitments on greenhouse gas emissions, would reduce our carbon footprint, and would lead to more innovation and research.

For the Minister of Natural Resources, when it comes to energy, better public transit would mean better energy utilization and lower reliance on fossil fuels, and more emphasis on innovation and research.

For the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, there would be an impact on immigrants. New Canadians bring such a wealth of talent to our cities and rely heavily on transit.

Think of the benefits for the Minister of Health with better air quality, less stress and fewer traffic accidents. Better transit means a healthier Canada. Think of the ability of patients and seniors to get to the doctor, the hospital, the clinic, or the outpatient facility. Think of the ability of ambulance drivers to quickly get through the traffic to the emergency wards. Think of the ability of hospital staff to get to work, to get to a night shift, to get home. People could afford to commute in cities where living downtown has become so expensive.

For the Minister of Industry, major investment in public transit and infrastructure would create jobs. Building train systems, buses and subway cars would improve competitiveness. It would move us forward with innovation and would open up more export opportunities.

We all would win, so let us not miss the bus or pass the buck. I am sure every minister in the government could think of many positive benefits of investing in public transit. It is hard to imagine any negative examples.

[*Translation*]

Think of children going to school or to their sports clubs, breathing in the fresh air, or going for a walk with their grandparents.

[*English*]

Think of working men and women who would be able to get to work on time and back home and spend more time with their children. People would exercise more.

Think of how many people we could help and how many lives we could touch. Let us not miss the bus or pass the buck. Let us move forward for all Canadians with all Canadians. Let us not leave anyone behind. Let us not hear anyone say that it cannot be done.

• (1755)

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in her opening remarks, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina stated that there is not consistent stable funding for municipalities regarding public transit. Six of Canada's largest cities, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary and Edmonton, invest over 90% of their gas tax fund allocation into public transit. Also, this government, in our budget 2011, made this gas tax funding permanent, a budget which the member voted against. I would like to ask the member, will she explain to these urban centres why she would not support them in that measure?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, actually I had a lot to do with getting the gas tax to municipalities. I was on the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and when I was a city councillor we

mounted a very big campaign to persuade the former Liberal government and then the Conservative government to make sure that the gas tax would be transferred to municipalities.

The former leader of our party, Mr. Layton, took one extra cent of the gas tax. Rather than letting it be used as a corporate tax cut, he made sure that the extra cent went to municipalities for public transit only. That fund was allocated through the ridership formula, and not just per capita.

Lots can be done, especially with the gas tax: it should be indexed, it should be more than 5¢, and it would be useful if it were made permanent.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to be a seconder of the bill that the member for Trinity—Spadina has brought forward.

I want to point out that Canada is the only country in the OECD without a national transit policy.

There is one segment of society that I am particularly concerned about that I do not think the member mentioned in her speech, and that is seniors. We have a growing demographic of seniors for whom independence means being able to get around on their own, both safely and securely. For a number of safety reasons, we should not be driving in our senior years.

Would the member like to comment on that aspect of seniors and mass transit?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I was in Whitehorse, Yukon, and met with the mayor there. She started a bus service in Whitehorse, and ridership jumped by 30% or 40% within a few months. She told me that there is a growing need for this service, because as the population ages, fewer people are able to drive.

Whitehorse is a small town, and people coming from other cities cannot reach it because there is just no bus service going into town. As well, parts of Whitehorse are not served by the bus service, because there is just not enough support from the federal government. She would welcome a national public transit strategy.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, because of the wonderful Garden City mall walker group we generated an idea about allowing seniors to ride the bus for free during non-peak hours. We talked a lot about this. During non-peak hours, and I am sure the member can relate to this, we see buses driving around empty, so we thought of allowing seniors to ride for free during non-peak hours. We all know the benefits seniors get from going out in their communities, whether it is for a cup of coffee, going out with grandchildren, or going for medical attention.

Private Members' Business

Maybe the member could provide some comment as to the idea of seniors being able to ride for free during non-peak hours.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I supported a private member's bill that asked the federal government to provide incentive funds so that if any municipalities or transit authorities wanted seniors to ride for free, they could do so. Quite a few countries in the world provide free transit to their seniors. It is a wonderful and much-needed service.

This transit bill pushes for fast, reliable, accessible and affordable public transit for everyone, especially seniors.

•(1800)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour to rise today to speak on this important piece of proposed legislation. I congratulate the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina for introducing it. Certainly she has a lot of experience in the field of municipal infrastructure and a background as an elected official at a municipal level, which perhaps explains why she is so interested in the direct management and operations of public transit.

While that knowledge and background adds to her ability to serve in this House, I think it has also caused her to put forward a proposal that would have the federal government overstretch its jurisdictional bounds and participate directly in the operations of an otherwise municipally-controlled and run service.

Paragraph 4(b)(ii) of the bill proposes that the federal government would fund the operations of municipal infrastructure. That is a fundamental change to the way our government has functioned in this country since its founding. The Government of Canada has, for years, provided capital funding for qualifying projects within municipalities. The government provides a stable stream of revenue for municipalities through the gas tax fund; then those municipalities take those gas tax dollars and apply them where they believe appropriate, within some limited federal confines. Sometimes they use it for transit, other times not.

The federal government does not, even in this fund, provide dollars for operations, nor should it. For reasons of both good management and constitutional jurisdiction, the Government of Canada cannot and must not fund operations.

Let us start with good management. As Napoleon once said, "Better one bad general than two good ones". The same goes for the idea of having two levels of government run the same transit system at the same time. When Canadians assess the quality of a service, they should know who provides it. The municipalities are entrusted with the operation of public transit because it is the municipal government that is closest to the people who use that particular service. If the system fails the voters in that given municipality, they know whom to blame; if it succeeds, they know whom to thank. That is accountability.

If every level of government is responsible for operating the same bus route, then no government is responsible for it. Let us consider the scenario that follows.

Let us imagine a rapid transit line that is failing commuters: its service is poor, its costs are unacceptably high and its trains never run on time. With the passage of this bill, no one could be held accountable for the poor operation of that service. Operations would be shared between orders of government. No one, therefore, can really accept the blame for that scenario.

Clear division of responsibility, therefore, is essential to good management and accountability.

I will now move on to constitutional responsibility. Section 92(8) of the Constitution states that municipalities are creatures of the provinces. Our forebears did not make it so by accident. If municipalities are the government closest to the people and the provinces are the second closest, it follows that the former are creatures of the latter. To have the federal government jump over the provinces and jointly operate services with the municipal administrations would create a cobweb of funding and management that would render the entire system unruly for both taxpayers and commuters.

The bill seems to acknowledge this point, to its credit, in clause 3. Clause 3 of the proposed act exempts Quebec, in recognition of that province's legitimate historical desire to protect its jurisdiction from federal encroachment. That makes sense.

Why would the equally legitimate jurisdictions of the nine other provinces and three other territories, all of which live under the same Constitution, not then enjoy the same exemption?

•(1805)

The reason is that the bill seems to go beyond the legitimate powers given to the federal government in the Constitution.

That brings us to the practical reason that our forebears created a system in this way—that is, the unfairness in a bill that would provide special funds for a service that only some Canadians could enjoy.

One of the benefits of our system of gas tax transfer is that it goes on a per capita basis to the municipalities. Some municipalities do not use public transit because they do not have the geography or population concentration to benefit from it, so chances are that people who live in Iqaluit or Wainwright or another smaller municipal jurisdiction in this country do not have a major public transit facility that their municipality could benefit from under the funding proposed in this bill. Only large urban centres would receive the funds, even though taxpayers from all sorts of municipalities would be forced to contribute to the annual operating costs of those transit projects.

This is compensated for in the system that we have at a national level, whereby the federal government invests in transit systems at a capital level when municipalities seek it, and then invests in other projects more appropriate for small jurisdictions when those municipalities seek funding. It might be a water treatment plant in Kentville, while it might be a large urban transit project in Trinity—Spadina.

Private Members' Business

This bill fails to acknowledge the difference between those two different types of jurisdictions, and would thus create a funding inequity through which funding received by large urban centres for municipal projects would not be offset with corresponding benefits for smaller jurisdictions.

That brings us to the next issue, which is cost. Like time, dollars are finite. We must remember that every time someone demands the government extend a benefit, the government cannot provide any benefit without first taking it away. Governments do not have money. Only taxpayers do. Given that the government is currently in a deficit, the only way to pay for new funding commitments, as this bill prescribes, is through more borrowing or higher taxes, neither of which are acknowledged in this bill, nor would they be defensible to the taxpayer. We must focus relentlessly on deficit elimination by the scheduled 2014 target date and we must do it through spending restraint.

For these reasons, and while we respect the good intentions of the bill and its author, the government is obliged to present opposition to the bill and will be voting against it. That being said, we look forward to working with all members of the House in order to improve the transportation and infrastructure that Canadians enjoy so that we can continue to move forward as the greatest country in the world.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this fits in with the work currently being done by the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities where we have come face to face with the reality. Canada does not have a national public transit strategy. The population is getting older. There are environmental considerations. We must work on improving coordination between all levels of government. We have made huge investments in infrastructure. Therefore, we obviously need a national public transit strategy.

Despite what the government says, and because I am from Quebec, I respect areas of jurisdiction, everyone knows that. We must ensure that jurisdictions are respected when we look at implementing a strategy. Basically, this bill calls for and would result in coordination. This complementarity would be achieved by holding a federal-provincial-territorial conference. It does not mean that we will do the work of the others involved. The principle of Quebec as a nation is recognized in clause 3, but the purpose is to ensure that we will all be able to work together. The same taxpayer is footing the bill, but today we can see that the money should perhaps be better spent. For that reason, we in the Liberal Party will vote in favour of this private member's bill.

When in power, the Liberal Party always invested heavily in infrastructure. I remember that, when I was a minister, we looked at public transit issues. In 2011, we can see what is happening in the municipalities. We have met on several occasions with representatives of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the mayors come to see us. We need to work on this file. I went to see the people at the Fédération québécoise des municipalités a few weeks ago. It is a top priority.

The bill clearly states—and it does not mention money—that the government is not being asked to pay for things; the government,

through the minister, is being asked to establish a strategy that would look into with funding mechanisms.

Everyone will try to take credit for it. We will commend Paul Martin, in particular, the first prime minister to address the situation by having the gas tax redirected to municipalities. The measure was subsequently made permanent and we support that. However, municipalities are telling us that this money is used for other things, that mass transit is necessary, and that the money must be found somewhere else.

Should we index this gas tax? Out of all the federal excise taxes, should we eventually take an additional sum from the gas tax and send it to the municipalities? That is the type of question we should be addressing when we talk about coordination and a federal-provincial-territorial conference. We really have no problem with that.

The word “national” might get some people excited—the Quebec nation or the Canadian nation? We will not get into the constitutional arguments today, but we will ensure that the jurisdictions are respected.

The Canadian and Quebec reality is that the municipalities are the key to the future. The role of government, of Parliament, is to protect people's quality of life and make sure we can improve it.

• (1810)

[*English*]

When we talk about a national strategy, Canada is not one size fits all. We have to ensure that the rural and urban municipalities are covered. We need to ensure that if we are talking about quality of life, helping seniors, youth and workers, that we do not have a one size fits all. A national strategy does not mean that we apply the same thing everywhere. It means that the country respects all the regional specificities in a common goal. That is what a national strategy should be. That is why we should take a look at this.

We should talk about the technology. We have to ensure that we use natural gas, electricity and new ways for public transportation. The bottom line is the environment, to protect our country and planet and public transit has a major impact on greenhouse gases.

[*Translation*]

We know that the Conservatives do not have a national strategic vision, but let us not be partisan. We are already working on this in the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities. I imagine that the government and its majority has just taken a bite out of the hon. member's ambitions for a good bill. We will carry on at report stage in the transport committee. A report from transport—that rhymes; I am such a poet today.

Private Members' Business

However, we will have to address another matter. Governance is one thing, but there has to be complementarity along with respect for each jurisdiction. The bill does not mention funding, but we should talk about it. The Liberal Party believes it is not just a public issue. This has been brought up in the transport committee. We have to turn to the private sector as well. We can have a public-private partnership, with rules to ensure security. We have to define what is meant by developers and by partnership with the private sector. In any event, the money all comes out of the same pocket.

This bill talks about strategy and therefore about partnership. Partnerships are not just about governance; they also involve economic considerations. If all the players could be gathered around the same table, we would be in a position to improve Canadians' quality of life.

We somewhat jokingly say that just because something is laughable does not mean that it is funny. We celebrated Car Free Day in Montreal. There may have been an orange wave, but there are certainly a lot of orange traffic cones in Montreal. Car Free Day lasted for a number of weeks this summer. The issue of traffic congestion must also be addressed. An investment in public transit is one way to deal with this problem but all the other methods of transportation must also be considered. The car is not our enemy. It is necessary in some circumstances. There is also the bicycle. We can give ourselves the tools and means to develop a broader strategy.

It is true that we have to think about governance, funding, partnerships and other methods of funding, but what is even more important is to inspire the public and give people hope. All the major cities in the world and all the G8 countries, currently have a strategy, except Canada. We have been addressing problems one by one, but we need to improve coordination and find a better way of doing things.

When we discuss a national public transit strategy, it will be essential that we do not take a piecemeal approach. We must consider the future of our infrastructure and think about the next 20 years. We must ensure that the existing infrastructure is adequate, but we must also consider other types of infrastructure. I am thinking here about high-speed trains, for example in the Quebec City to Windsor corridor, and light rail. When we build bridges, we must ensure that lanes are reserved for public transit.

We will enthusiastically support this bill. There are still holes, but we are here to do our job. We will have suggestions to make. We hope that everyone will take a non-partisan approach and support this bill.

• (1815)

[English]

Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak in support of Bill C-305, An Act to establish a National Public Transit Strategy.

I would like to commend my colleague, the member for Trinity—Spadina, for all the hard work and dedication that she has invested over the years on this tremendously important topic.

The proposed bill provides a strategy for long-term, permanent investment in public transit funded by the federal government. It also fosters co-operation between the various levels of government in

order to ensure sustainable, predictable and adequate resources for the transit needs of all Canadians. Additionally, it establishes accountability measures that ensure governments collaborate to increase access to public transit.

For too long, Canada has been the only G8 country lacking a consistent, long-term investment strategy to maintain and expand public transit. As a result, Canada lags behind other nations in terms of providing its citizens with public transit options that are affordable, accessible and convenient.

The government must provide Canadians with the tools they need to broaden the scope of transit projects. The public has demonstrated a strong desire for greater transportation choices and is willing to take action and fund public transit.

Public transit is a vital resource for many communities. Its value extends beyond the simple movement of people and goods. Public transit provides environmental benefits as well as long-term social, health and economic benefits. The issue of climate change and of the need for healthy liveable communities must be at the forefront of this debate.

The implementation of a national transit strategy is anticipated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2.4 million tonnes a year. This means an annual electricity savings equivalent to the amount used by a city the size of Saskatoon. It allows us to reduce our dependence on oil and gas, a non-renewable resource, whose price will only continue to rise into the future. Reducing CO₂ emissions will allow future generations to benefit from our vast natural resources, pristine wilderness, diverse ecosystems and thriving communities.

Public transit saves \$115 million a year in health care costs related to respiratory illnesses. As populations increase, a focus on health and prevention is vital.

An effective transit system is also a pillar of our economy. It is estimated that the economic benefit of Canada's existing public transit system is about \$10 billion a year in savings through reduced vehicle operating costs and the reduction of traffic accidents. In addition, the transit industry employs over 45,000 Canadians and creates an additional 24,000 jobs indirectly. These statistics are not insignificant, especially in these difficult economic times. By investing in public transit, Canada also has an opportunity to create green jobs for its citizens.

We need to work with municipalities, provinces and territories to provide the predictable, adequate and long-term funding necessary to fill the critical gaps in our transportation networks. Responsibility for transportation should not be off-loaded to local and regional jurisdictions that are already overwhelmed by these demands, such as what is happening in the Lower Mainland. Community planning needs to be conducted comprehensively and effectively, not piecemeal.

Private Members' Business

I urge the federal government to take a leadership role in ensuring effective public transit planning across the country. This means meeting the challenges of urban communities by building and maintaining inner-city bus and rail lines. This means establishing accountability measures that ensure all levels of government work together to increase access to public transit.

Public transit investment creates jobs for Canadians and fuels the local economy. It contributes to cleaner air by lowering greenhouse gas emissions and decreasing congestion. It reduces the pressure to build more roads and helps to create more liveable communities. Bill C-305 is our opportunity to work together and solve an issue that affects so many of our constituents.

• (1820)

Far too many times I have heard from constituents who wait for a bus for too long or, in some cases, for a bus that never arrives. Transit service in my community in New Westminster—Coquitlam and Port Moody is inadequate.

Projects aimed at improving public transportation, such as the proposed Evergreen Line in my riding, have experienced countless delays. The Evergreen Line is anticipated to service 70,000 passengers a day, reduce 4.7 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions and other air contaminants emitted by cars, and provide 9,000 construction jobs.

The project was first proposed in 1993, almost 20 years ago, and yet we still struggle to fund the \$574 million gap for this community-enhancing project.

Canadians cannot afford to wait for essential transit services any longer. Communities across the country face similar challenges and require similar supports. The Evergreen Line is only one of many projects that a national transit strategy would help address.

The current government has failed to keep pace with municipalities and Canadians' growing demand for public transit. For example, 35% of current necessary infrastructure investments in rapid transit lines remain unmet. Funding is also falling short in stock rehabilitation and replacement, maintenance facilities, and advanced technology investment.

The Canadian Urban Transit Association estimates that Canadian public transit systems face an \$18 billion funding gap in transit infrastructure needs between 2010 and 2014. The adoption of a national transit strategy would ensure that resources allocated to transit would be used in the most efficient manner possible. A national transit strategy would also go a long way to ensure our communities are healthier and more livable.

The national public transit strategy act is about securing investment in key areas within the country. It would create jobs, improve commute times, help the environment, and allow our cities and communities to plan and implement the public transit projects that they need.

The act would bring together the Minister of Transport, provincial transportation ministers, representatives of municipalities and transit authorities, aboriginal communities, and many others to design and establish a national public transit strategy to meet the needs of our communities.

The objective here is to move away from unstable short-term funding programs in favour of providing secure infrastructure planning for the future. The aim is to foster more effective co-operation among all levels of government and transit networks directed by clearly defined national and provincial objectives.

A national transit strategy would increase collaboration to provide better data collection research and to better integrate transportation systems to capture important synergies between urban development and infrastructure, and to pay greater attention to the integration of land use.

A national transit strategy would ensure better performance measurements to ensure value from investments and to improve future planning. A national public transit strategy is well supported by many people; for example, Berry Vrbanovic, president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, and the Canadian Urban Transit Association.

Mayors and municipalities across Canada, from Charlottetown to Toronto to Winnipeg to Vancouver, are all calling for a commitment from the federal government for public transit. Feedback from Canadians echo these sentiments.

Affordable, efficient and well-organized public transportation networks in cities across our country are vital to ensuring Canada's success in the 21st century.

We must work together to ensure that these needs of our citizens are adequately met and that we are prepared to meet the challenges of tomorrow. By adopting a national public transit strategy, we would protect our environment, improve the health of Canadians, and create more livable communities.

• (1825)

I urge all members of the House to consider the great need in our country for a national public transit strategy and I call on my colleagues on both sides of the House to support Bill C-305.

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to compliment the member for Trinity—Spadina for her passionate introduction to this bill. I know that the member has put a great deal of effort into this subject and in bringing forward this bill. I have read the information that the member was kind enough to send to my office and I have some concerns.

I believe it is important to first give consideration to how public transit is working for Canadians today. Although I am still new to Parliament, the advice that I seek from many of my experienced predecessors is always to exercise caution. We must be careful in attempting to resolve one challenge that we do not inadvertently create many new challenges.

Private Members' Business

When I look at Canada's economic action plan, it has clearly been very successful, thanks in large part to our partnership with the provinces, territories and municipalities across this great country. Like the member for Trinity—Spadina, I am also a former city councillor. Local government understands its unique community challenges and the solutions that it can afford. It is important to have flexibility to meet the individual needs of provinces and municipalities.

I note that the member for Trinity—Spadina has reflected this language within parts of Bill C-305. In clause 3, for example, the member uses language only to the benefit of one province, however, and not equally to the others. I would humbly submit that the success of being able to recognize the unique nature of provincial jurisdiction for all provinces is equally very important because we must not forget that there is only one taxpayer paying the bill.

I believe that the success is in the results and the achievement of Canada's economic action plan has occurred for a reason. The reason is because Canada's economic action plan created partnerships that recognized the unique jurisdiction of every province and their respective local governments. Those agreements allowed Infrastructure Canada to invest \$10.6 billion into roughly 6,400 infrastructure projects all across our great nation. These funds, when combined with the contributions of our funding partners in provincial and local governments, created a \$30 billion injection into our local economies.

These unique partnerships allowed our provinces and municipalities to decide how best to improve local public transit systems within their own jurisdictions. Cities like Langley, Calgary, Guelph, Oakville, Ottawa and Montreal have received federal investments in their public transit systems that will create better commuting options. However, these options are different and unique. They might be in the form of light rail systems, hybrid electric buses, and new and improved transit facilities. In my hometown, more energy efficient buses were purchased.

We should also recognize that since 2006 our government has invested close to \$5 billion in public transit infrastructure across Canada. This has resulted in over 100 public transit investments in transit infrastructure as a result of the gas tax fund. The importance of the gas tax fund for transit investment is evidenced by the fact that a large number of cities have directed either all or a very large portion of their federal gas tax allocations to public transit. However, for smaller rural communities, public transit can also mean upgrading a public walking path, as was done in the community of Okanagan Falls in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla.

Once again, it is important to work with the provinces in a manner that recognizes unique provincial jurisdictions and the individual needs of local government. This is why our government works in collaboration with the Union of British Columbia Municipalities and the Association of Municipalities of Ontario to administer the gas tax fund in British Columbia and Ontario, respectively.

Six of Canada's largest cities, Toronto, Vancouver, Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary and Edmonton, invest over 90% of their gas tax fund allocations in public transit. This means we are already working with our partners to support transit initiatives in a very positive and successful manner.

Our government recognizes that transit needs vary widely in Canada, just as they differ widely in my own riding. This is why we create partnerships with provincial and local governments. These unique relationships provide for flexibility. The needs of larger cities may well differ from those of mid-size cities, such as Brampton, Kitchener-Waterloo, Red Deer or Kelowna.

• (1830)

For a retirement community, low floor buses and upgrades to bus stops for increased accessibility may be a priority. Whereas in West Kelowna, a rapid bus program now takes students from that community to the University of British Columbia's Okanagan campus in times never before thought possible.

This was part of a unique \$20 million investment jointly funded by our government and our partners. These are just a few examples of our investments and unique partnerships that are successfully increasing public transit and infrastructure programs all across Canada.

It is important to note that our government is also taking a lead role in other areas. For example, the federal government offers a tax credit to help cover the cost of public transit. This helps make public transit more affordable for individual Canadians.

We are also supporting public transit infrastructure through targeted initiatives such as the \$10 million ecoMOBILITY program. This program provides financial support to municipalities and regional transportation authorities for transportation demand management projects that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In addition, several federal departments, agencies and crown corporations work in partnership with other levels of government and stakeholders on activities which support transit. Research and development, capacity building, and the use of technology and best practices are all part of that.

For example, the West Kelowna rapid bus program, that I mentioned earlier, features buses that are equipped with technology that extends green lights at intersections, allowing them to keep moving instead of stopping.

Soon, many stations will have digital screens providing passengers with real time schedule information. I should also mention that our government, together with representatives from provincial and territorial governments, is a member of the urban transit task force.

The task force is a forum for collaboration on urban transportation issues of common interest. Clearly, a broad and unique approach to long-term infrastructure planning for public infrastructure, including public transit, is important.

In budget 2011 our government indicated that it will continue working with key infrastructure partners now and in the future.

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Key stakeholders, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Canadian Urban Transit Association, have already expressed their interest in working with our government. It is important to continue to work collaboratively with our partners to deliver the \$33 billion building Canada plan.

I am also supportive of our recently tabled government legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent at \$2 billion per year. This means that municipalities can count on this stable funding for their transit and infrastructure related projects.

In summary, I believe that our government has demonstrated a commitment, including funding, that works with the unique needs of our municipalities, provinces and territories. These partnerships create accountability to taxpayers as they recognize the unique jurisdiction of the provinces and local governments to partner in a manner they can afford in support of projects they deem as priorities. Public transit is important, and we as members of Parliament must work together to ensure that the needs of Canadians are met.

I would like to applaud the member for Trinity—Spadina for raising such an important subject in Bill C-305.

While I believe it is important that we continue to build on our past accomplishments and work with our partners to identify the priorities of the future, we must do so in a manner that recognizes that Canada is a diverse country, and it will be partnerships that can individually recognize the unique needs of individual provincial jurisdictions and local governments that achieve these important objectives.

As a result, I cannot support Bill C-305. I am nonetheless grateful for the opportunity to stand in the House to highlight the importance of working with our partners, and to continue to build on our government's unprecedented success in creating partnerships that result in projects that Canadians can count on and afford.

•(1835)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, I must inform her that there will only be about a minute left, but we will start just the same.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak in the House today in support of Bill C-305 introduced by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina to establish a national public transit strategy. Canadians living in rural communities have different transportation needs than those living in urban centres, and I am proud to see that Bill C-305 responds to the needs of Canadians and Quebecers living in the regions.

My riding of Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel has at least 42 municipalities, the vast majority of which are small communities. There is a serious lack of public transit outside the larger centres and people who do not have access to a vehicle are cut off from necessary services.

This bill establishes a national public transit strategy that will make planning possible across the different modes of transportation. It will improve the quality of life of my constituents by making services more accessible, by making transportation to work and school easier and more accessible, and even by creating jobs.

I will be pleased to talk about that the next time we debate Bill C-305 in the House.

•(1840)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member will have nine minutes for her speech when the House resumes debate on the motion.

[*English*]

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the parliamentary secretary for taking the time to be here tonight.

On September 27, I was grateful to have had the opportunity to co-host a screening of the channel four documentary, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, with my fellow parliamentarians, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, as well as the hon. member for Barrie. Also present was a representative from Human Rights Watch.

This documentary detailed the alleged human rights violations and crimes against humanity that were committed in Sri Lanka during the final phase of the Sri Lankan civil war. The screening of this documentary moved me, as it did everyone else in the room who was watching. That night, we demonstrated that partisan lines could be crossed in order to seek justice for those whose human rights have been violated.

On this side of the House, we have been calling on the government to take action and commit to fighting for justice for Sri Lankans. We called for action in 2009. New Democrats stood with hundreds of thousands of Canadians from across the country who were calling on the very same government to take action. Jack Layton stood with these Canadians and facilitated an emergency debate in the House, on the Sri Lankan conflict, demanding that the government stand up for human rights and justice.

Adjournment Proceedings

We have been asking the government to call upon the United Nations to follow the recommendations provided by its own panel of experts and to launch an independent investigation into the allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity that may have been committed during the final phase of the Sri Lankan conflict. Canada is home to one of the largest communities of Tamil diaspora in the world, outside of India, many of whom live in my constituency of Scarborough—Rouge River and across the greater Toronto area in general.

These are people who have lived through the atrocities committed during the Sri Lankan conflict. These are people who have witnessed their loved ones being murdered or kidnapped. These are people who have felt unsafe in their own homes. My family joined these people, fleeing our home country to come to Canada, leaving behind our friends, families and loved ones. Many of us risked our lives in order to escape the horrors taking place inside our homes and in our own backyards.

During the almost 30 years of this conflict, and particularly during the final phase of the war, Canadians and the rest of the world stood idly by. Though there were many cries for help, there was no foreign intervention in the spring of 2009. Even the United Nations left Sri Lanka during the final phase of the conflict. We cannot continue this inaction. The United Nations expert panel, as well as the channel four documentary, *Sri Lanka's Killing Fields*, show that there are serious allegations that war crimes and crimes against humanity were committed during the final phase of the war. It is time for the global community to come together to fight for peace and justice in Sri Lanka.

Representatives are meeting later this week in Perth, Australia for the Commonwealth leaders summit. With these allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity, we know that Sri Lanka will be a topic of discussion as Sri Lanka is scheduled to host the next summit in 2013.

When is the government going to fight for justice for Sri Lankans? What concrete steps will Canada take to ensure that Sri Lanka complies with and demonstrates human rights values consistent with those held by Canadians, members of the Commonwealth and the United Nations?

•(1845)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the parliamentary secretary, I would just remind members that during adjournment proceedings they are welcome to take any seat in the chamber. I know that it is force of habit to take the seat they usually have, but members are welcome to do that.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this issue is quite important for this government, a government that stands up for human rights.

We are very much aware of the tremendous sacrifices made by the people of Sri Lanka during the civil conflict and the relief felt as a result of the successful end to this civil war.

The Prime Minister, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and myself, on my visit to Sri Lanka immediately after the war, stated Canada's position quite clearly.

Canada is very concerned that the underlying sources of conflict are not being addressed and we are of the view that a political solution, including the devolution of power, is a critical component of sustainable peace in Sri Lanka.

Canada urges the government of Sri Lanka to establish an independent investigation into the credible allegations of serious violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights committed by both sides of the conflict. We expect Sri Lanka's lessons learned on the reconciliation commission will address these issues, including the recommendations of the UN Secretary-General's panel of experts.

Canada is of the view that the government of Sri Lanka must show tangible progress in the handling of political reconciliation and seriously address the credible allegations of violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law as reported by the UN Secretary-General's panel of experts.

To add to what the hon. member said about the Commonwealth conference that is taking place now in Perth, Canada is of the view that this issue must be addressed. We have made it very clear to the Sri Lankan government that we expect to see some tangible progress in Sri Lanka in terms of human rights, political reconciliation and accountability. The Prime Minister has made it clear that if he does not see any tangible evidence moving toward that direction, then he will not attend the next Commonwealth conference to be held in Sri Lanka.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiyan: Mr. Speaker, we all know the saying, "actions speak louder than words". We can talk all we want, but nothing will change until we actually take action. We need action now, not just words.

We need to call upon the United Nations to launch an independent inquiry into the allegations of war crimes and crimes against humanity. We know that the reconciliation committee as created by Sri Lanka was deemed to be biased and not independent by the United Nations panel of experts.

We need to take concrete action to ensure that Sri Lanka demonstrates respect for human rights and human dignity and complies with these values held by progressive democracies.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Speaker, as my hon. colleague is a new member of Parliament, I would like to let her know that diplomacy works behind the scenes. We have been sending a message to the government in power that these are our concerns. That is how people can achieve results. That is what we have been doing since the civil war ended. I have visited there. If the government does not address the issues of what transpired during the reconciliation process, then we would be in a situation where possibly down the road the same conflict would start up again. In order for the country to move ahead, it is in the best interests of Sri Lanka to do that. We, as a Commonwealth nation, are willing to help Sri Lanka move down the reconciliation path.

Adjournment Proceedings

Sri Lanka must also address the credible concerns of the UN Secretary-General on the violation of human rights in that country.

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to follow up on a couple of questions I had in the House of Commons that relate to cuts the government is making to a number of different services. The first is the Canada Border Services Agency and the second is employment insurance.

My riding in Windsor has the largest volume of international traffic travelling between Canada and the United States. In fact, it ranks in the world's top class. We are seeing the CBSA headquarters office move to Niagara Falls. Despite the fact that a report said that it should be consolidated in Windsor, the government has decided to move it to a minister's riding at the expense of drugs and smugglers getting into this country and at the expense of a series of different problems that we will see emerge.

The reason I know that is that I have met with the men and women who serve so ably in the Windsor region and they will now have to communicate with supervisors 400 kilometres away from the most important border crossing that this country has. It has the highest volume and it has the highest issues that have to be dealt with. It is a border crossing that consists of four independent ways to get vehicles, trains, trucks and cars across to the Detroit region and then into the United States. It is a very sensitive region.

To relocate the headquarters to Niagara Falls 400 kilometres away, when executive decisions need to be made about whether to investigate, take down or take action on smugglers, drug runners and other types of things we do not want to have in our country, is wrong.

The second issue is the cuts to employment insurance in an area of high unemployment. We are seeing 73 people who are facing layoff. The government has backed off on some of them because of the pressure. It is wrong because right now people rely upon those cheques and services. In the division that is being cut and reduced, it recently won an award in Canada for service. The employees won an award and now they get a pink slip. It is unacceptable. We want to see the restoration of those services.

The parliamentary secretary said, "we are doing that by investing" when she was referring to public safety, and the other minister said that "no impact on persons servicing is going to take place". That is absolutely not true. We know the government is cutting the Windsor service because of austerity measures. It has publicly admitted that. It has said that the reduction is taking place because it needs to reduce the CBSA file and the money in it to make way for changes with regard to the budgetary process.

We know the changes to employment insurance will affect the front-line people because we have lost the decision-makers who look at arbitrary cases for employment insurance. These are people who have been trained for a number of years to do that job. They have gone through several layers of training to become a processing person who actually looks at the cases, makes decisions and makes recommendations about someone getting employment insurance. That is critical because other boards and agencies have often tried to cherry-pick some of these workers because they are so good.

However, we are showing them the pink slip right now despite the fact that they have the best qualifications and credentials.

There is the very important position of a youth service operator worker who does outreach for young people. In my region, we have 20% unemployment for youth. It is unacceptable and we should not be losing services right now because they are critical for serving people and keeping streets in our community safe.

•(1850)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as hon. members are aware, our government departments are required to conduct strategic reviews every five years.

Last April, as part of its strategic review, the CBSA consolidated its southern Ontario regional operations. As a result of merging two regions, only one regional headquarters was required in order to optimize administrative operations and create better efficiencies.

When the two regional offices amalgamated, the CBSA was able to focus its resourcing priorities to continue to ensure an efficient, safe and secure border. It is important to understand that there were no closures or port of entry changes as a result of merging these two regions.

The only significant change was that the administration for the regional headquarters was centralized in one location. This was not a decision that was taken lightly, and all of the factors were considered. These factors included: impacts to staff, stakeholder consultations, cost effectiveness, infrastructure commitments and trade and traveller volumes. In the end, the top deciding factors were impacts to staff and the cost effectiveness for Canadian taxpayers.

It has been almost six months since the CBSA consolidated its regional headquarters into one location. I can say that the CBSA continues to serve Canadians by protecting the border with professionalism and integrity. No services have been affected and there have been no interruptions at the border.

While regional reporting structures have changed, the day-to-day work conducted by border service officers has not changed. The CBSA is committed to ensuring that these front-line operations continue to run smoothly.

The hon. members in this House should be aware that there have been many inaccurate reports about this administrative change and I would like to set the record straight.

First, and most important, no front-line positions were affected by this office relocation. Second, only a small number of positions were actually affected and, in the end, no jobs were lost as a result. Third, the CBSA will save \$1.5 million per year by merging these administrative, human resources and information technology capacities.

CBSA will continue to ensure the security of the Canadian border in an efficient, cost-effective manner, as is expected by the Canadian taxpayer.

Adjournment Proceedings

• (1855)

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, it is quite amazing. I loved the preamble with regard to the parliamentary secretary saying that there were no closures between these two crossings when the amalgamation took place.

When we think about that logically, that is 60% of the trade that goes between Canada and the United States, so of course there would be no closures to crossing. To suggest that Fort Erie or the Windsor-Detroit corridor would lose crossings is completely ludicrous and it does not even make any sense. It certainly shows the efforts the government is making to change the channel.

The reality is that we did lose staff and personnel in the field, because we have managers and other support systems that are now gone. Those support systems are very important. The decision-makers who would actually make the call at the end of the day are now gone. Now we have to communicate with people 400 kilometres away.

We do not know what type of drugs are getting into the country. We do not know what kind of guns are getting into the country. We do not know what type of smugglers are getting into the country. It is all because we have devolved the entire system in Windsor just for \$1.5 million.

The busiest border crossing in this country, in this North American system, is now a headless horseman.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Mr. Speaker, last April, the CBSA created one regional headquarters to maximize its resources. Once again, this decision was not taken lightly and, in the end, the deciding factors were impacts to staff and cost effectiveness.

After almost six months, border operations continue to run effectively and efficiently. The hon. member needs to put a little more confidence in the CBSA people who are running the borders. He is crying foul when they are doing an excellent job of guarding our borders. It is also important to note that no front-line positions were affected.

By merging the administrative components of this office, the CBSA will save \$1.5 million per year. Canadians watching right now will agree that \$1.5 million is a very substantial saving to the taxpayers in Canada.

The CBSA continues to maintain border security in an efficient, cost-effective manner, as is expected by Canadian taxpayers.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:58 p.m.)

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House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 038 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, October 27, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, October 27, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

The Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table the annual reports on the Access to Information Act and the Privacy Act of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages for the year 2010-2011.

[*Translation*]

This document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

* * *

[*English*]

FAIR REPRESENTATION ACT

Hon. Peter Van Loan (for the Minister of State (Democratic Reform)) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-20, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act and the Canada Elections Act.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

HOLIDAYS ACT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-337, An Act to amend the Holidays Act (Flag Day).

He said: Mr. Speaker, in 2015, the 50th anniversary of our Canadian flag occurs. As I have raised before in this House, it is vitally important that we have a national holiday to celebrate the Canadian flag, a flag that unites us from coast to coast to coast.

I have introduced this bill in the House previously. I am hoping that, in this 41st Parliament, we will finally have the opportunity to vote on this bill and bring forward a national flag day in February. In many provinces in this country, we now have civic holidays that fall on the third Monday in February and this particular bill would do

exactly the same thing. It would extend that civic holiday nationally in honour of our nation's flag.

[*Translation*]

In 2015, the 50th anniversary of our national flag occurs. What a great idea to have a national holiday to celebrate the Canadian flag.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

[*English*]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-338, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (termination and severance pay).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to introduce my severance protection bill.

As we found out, since 2008 a lot of companies are struggling, which means that a lot of workers and their families are struggling. When companies close their doors, what happens to workers in this country is that their severance pay is unsecured when those bankruptcy proceedings occur.

This is a very simple, straightforward bill with only one clause and it would elevate the status of those payments from unsecured to preferred. My old bill from the last Parliament, Bill C-501, has now been taken over by my friend from Hamilton. I am very glad that the pension part will also be taken care of. This is the severance part.

I want to let everyone in the House know that this is not a political statement. It is a measured and effective proposal that could help workers who are owed money during bankruptcy proceedings. It would do so without disrupting capital markets or negatively affecting the borrowing costs of struggling companies. It would also fulfill a promise that I made to workers from Buchanan Forest Products and others in my riding and, indeed, workers right across this country, that we would protect their severance when their companies go bankrupt.

Government Orders

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

• (1010)

PETITIONS

SEARCH AND RESCUE

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to present a petition wherein the petitioners object to the closing of the marine rescue co-ordination centre in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador.

The petition is signed by a number of residents of the area of St. John's and residents from other parts of Newfoundland and Labrador, such as Portugal Cove, Musgrave Harbour and Twillingate, and even by some residents of New Brunswick. The petitioners oppose the decision to close the marine rescue co-ordination centre in St. John's.

The petitioners urge the Government of Canada to acknowledge that the closure will mean services will suffer and lives will be put at risk.

Some of the facts that they cite in the petition is that the Newfoundland and Labrador region has the highest proportion of distress incidents in Canada. The Coast Guard Operations Marine Centre responds to an annual average of over 500 incidents involving 2,900 people, saving the lives of an estimated 600 people in distress each year. The St. John's rescue centre is responsible for 900,000 square kilometres of ocean and nearly 29,000 kilometres of coast land.

This is something that is of grave importance to the people of Newfoundland and Labrador. The petitioners want the decision reversed because it needs to be reinstated.

CANADA POST

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the manner in which the government took action against our postal workers was not fair or right and it has not been forgotten. The people who have signed this petition are calling upon the House of Commons to review the role the federal government played in denying the workers of Canada Post the ability to have a negotiated labour contract based on a free collective bargaining process.

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of hundreds of residents of the Lower Mainland of British Columbia, southern Alberta and the Calgary region. These are individuals who believe that Canada should be providing visa free requirements for visitors from Serbia to Canada.

As members know, Serbian Canadians have played a terrific role in the growth and development of Canada. In fact, in British Columbia, they could be considered to be among the founding people, because Serbian immigrants to British Columbia were there and present when British Columbia entered Confederation. Of course, in my riding, I have a very strong and vibrant Serbian population, including the presence of a Serbian community centre.

As members know, 25 European states have waived visa requirements for Serbian visitors travelling throughout the European Union. These Canadians in Calgary, southern Alberta and the Lower Mainland believe that Canada should offer the same visa free travel requirements from Serbia to Canada.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

BILL C-19—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, not more than three further sitting days shall be allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the bill; and

That, 15 minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government orders on the third day allotted to the consideration at second reading stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and, in turn, every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively, without further debate or amendment.

[Translation]

The Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1 there will now be a 30-minute question period.

• (1015)

[English]

I would invite all hon. members who are interested in participating in this 30-minute question and answer period to stand in their place so the Chair has an idea of how to best allot the time.

We will try to keep the questions and comments to about a minute and a half and the responses of a similar length. As in previous periods such as this, the Chair will give preference to members of the opposition to best allocate the time. Although government members will be recognized in the rotation, the preference will be given to the opposition members.

I will recognize the House Leader of the Opposition

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what we are faced with today is really interesting. Back on October 1, 2002, the current Prime Minister made this statement with regard to the Liberal government of the day. He stated:

The government has used closure and time allocation more frequently than any previous government.

Government Orders

The interesting thing about that is that, at that point, October 1, 2002, there were 212 sitting days in the 37th Parliament and the Liberal government of the day had moved time allocation nine times over 212 days. The current Conservative government has now moved time allocation for the fifth time in 35 days.

Is the House leader trying to match the record set by the previous Liberal government or is he willing to look at his practice and say that it is wrong for democracy and give us more time for debate?

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, the numbers that the opposition House leader provided are rather misleading because most of the legislation to which he referred that have been the subject of time allocation motions have been before the House in several previous Parliaments and have cumulatively been debated by the House for literally hundreds of days. As a result, there has been abundant debate on all these issues.

We ran an election on May 2 and told Canadians the things on which we would deliver and the commitments we were making. They responded to those commitments by providing us a majority mandate to deliver on those commitments. We are, right now, ensuring that we are delivering on the commitments we made in the last election and doing what we said we would do.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government House leader is wrong. He tries to give the impression that the government has done due diligence and has allowed for a good, healthy debate on issues. This is now, as has been pointed out, the fifth time. The last time the government did it was on the Canadian Wheat Board and, within hours of the debate getting under way, moved time allocation. That was the first time that bill was actually being debated and those time constraints were instituted.

In recognition of the importance and respect of the chamber, in which we all want to represent our constituents, by not allowing ample opportunity for members of the opposition, even government backbenchers, to provide comment on bills is not a healthy environment. The government House leader has the responsibility to work with and negotiate with House leaders. Time allocation should only be brought in when the government has failed to negotiate with opposition House leaders.

Has the government House leader given up negotiating in good faith with House leaders to the degree to which the government now feels obligated to bring in time allocation as a standard procedure nowadays in the House?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think that everyone in the House recognizes that our House leader is a reasonable, indeed, patient person and has demonstrated patience and reasonableness on numerous occasions.

In respect of Bill C-19, we need to be clear. This debate has been going on since 1995. There have been countless days before this Parliament and past Parliaments in respect of this issue. The issue here is not a complex one. It is a straight up and down question: Do we want to continue the long gun registry or not? Almost every member, prior to the last election, made a clear statement in respect of their position on the long gun registry.

We are clear and we are providing a rather generous four days as compared to past Liberal governments that only provided one day in order to ram through very complex bills. This is not a complex bill. This is a straight up and down question.

•(1020)

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I find it ironic that the government House leader talked about the clear mandate the Conservatives received and therefore they are going to put time allocation on this legislation. All we have had is 34 minutes of debate on this legislation. There is no indication that anyone wants to carry this debate on forever, yet they brought in time allocation immediately.

It is one thing to say they have formed a majority government, and I think we acknowledge that, but to suggest it is a strong mandate from all Canadians to do everything the Conservatives want to do and to ram it through Parliament is another question entirely. It was not only government members who were elected in the election, but our party is the largest official opposition party the country has had in 30 years. Members deserve an opportunity to participate in this debate. There are more than 60 new members in our caucus alone who have not had an opportunity to participate in this debate. The minister is saying that they will not be allowed to participate because the government has brought in time allocation.

Does the minister not recognize that is not just the Conservatives who were elected? They got a majority government, but there is a very strong opposition, and in fact, 60% of Canadians voted for parties other than the Conservative Party.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I would reiterate that this is a very clear question. It has been the subject of numerous debates not only in the House and in the other place, but also in the public generally. This has been a matter of debate in every riding prior to every election.

Three days are being allocated for the further discussion of this bill. It has been very clear what the opposition coalition of the Liberals and New Democrats want. Those members have indicated that they simply want to retain the long gun registry and will take every step to delay this process.

Those members do not want this matter to come to a vote for another reason as well, which is that their members are divided and they do not want the public to see the division between their members. That is why they will use every procedural trick in the book, as we have seen in the past little while, to delay the meaningful debate on the bill.

Three days of debate on this simple question gives a meaningful period for debate.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Madam Speaker, the positions may be clear, but the goal of a debate is not only to describe a position but also to explain why one espouses it. Although this debate has been going on for a long time, as the minister pointed out, many things have changed. For example, the government did not say that it would destroy the information in the registry instead of transferring it to the provinces. That had not been said before and is new information. Now, we should have the opportunity to discuss it.

Incidents continue to happen and new statistics on crime in our communities are published. We should have the right to talk about them.

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, this is an amazing argument that somehow the government said it would not destroy the data. Our government has been very clear and our party has been very clear. We are getting rid of the registry. We are scrapping the registry.

What is the registry? The registry is data. There is no distinction. Like a Philadelphia lawyer, the member opposite says we said that we would destroy the registry but not the data. The two are inseparable. It is similar to a farmer saying to his neighbour, “I know you wanted to buy my farm. I am willing to sell you the farm, but I’m keeping the land”.

● (1025)

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to respond to the statement that the data is equivalent to the registry. That is not so at all.

The registry is a process in a system for ensuring that there is a record of guns. It is a requirement. It is a regulation. It is an understanding. It is a process for putting that understanding in place that the government will actually track these weapons that are used in so many tragedies of suicide and domestic violence.

There is data collected, but the registry is actually an information technology system. It is a system for tracking, registering and providing information. That is what the registry is about.

The government has gone beyond the ideological elimination of something that the police, citizens, women and victims’ spokespeople say is an important tool for saving lives and protecting people. It has gone well beyond that with the elimination of the data.

Why is the government going beyond ideology and slapping the faces of those who might want to—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I would invite the member to review her question and her comments. That is one of the most unintelligible comments I have heard in this House: we are not dealing with data when we are dealing with the registry; we are dealing with information. I would ask the member to tell us what the distinction is between data and information. She indicates that the registry is more than information or data, that it is a process. It is a process to do what? It is a process to collect information and data.

Our government said that we would get rid of the registry. We are getting rid of the registry, which is a process that collects data or information. That is what we are doing. That is what we promised the Canadian people.

Now members are saying to tell the Canadian people that we are getting rid of the registry but we are keeping the data. That makes absolutely no sense at all.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to provide a historical perspective on this issue.

Some of the opposition members may not be aware of the fact that we have debated this now for about 15 years. The comment by the member from Newfoundland that we have only had 34 minutes of debate on this issue is absolutely absurd.

In fact I was here yesterday after those 34 minutes, and it was the NDP that decided it was not going to have any more debate on this issue. It was that particular opposition party that shut this down. It is a bit hypocritical for the NDP to complain that it needs more time to debate.

We just finished the Canadian Wheat Board debate, and I was here for most of that as well. After the first hour, not one new element was presented. After those 34 minutes, and after the opposition gave its first speech, not one single piece of new evidence came forward.

We have been debating this now for 15 years. In the last Parliament we debated it ad nauseam. I am not sure how many hours we debated it.

Does the minister think there is any new data coming forward that we might wish to consider? If so, would three days be enough time to present that data?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I thank the member for his very hard work on this file over the last 15 years.

Rather than provide my own comment, I will go right to what the Canadian Police Association said about this issue:

The Government received a clear mandate from the last election to proceed with their proposed changes to the long-gun registry....We respect the message that voters have sent on this issue.

The CPA has indicated that I have consulted with them regularly on issues affecting public safety and front-line officer concerns. It concludes:

We’re quite satisfied with the efforts the government has made to work on behalf of front-line police officers, specifically with respect to the comprehensive justice legislation [Bill C-10] that has been a priority since the last election.

The police are saying that this debate has gone on long enough. Let us get on to substantive issues that actually deal with public safety.

● (1030)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is an outrageous abuse of Parliament that we are seeing from the government again.

There were a lot of commitments made in the spring. The government said it would be moderate. The Conservatives hauled out the sweater vests during the election campaign and said that they would be listening to the public and respecting Parliament.

Government Orders

We have seen, as our House leader, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, has pointed out, a more excessive use of closure, a more excessive use of the sledgehammer in this Parliament than by any preceding government in Canadian history. We have seen a government that has an appalling level of arrogance, unparalleled in Canadian parliamentary history.

That is not what the Conservatives promised. What they promised was to actually listen to Parliament. They promised to respect Canadians.

Let us set the record straight. The actual debate that we have had since I have been in Parliament is the following. There was one hour on a government bill back in June 2007 and then the government withdrew the bill. There were two hours of debate on a private member's bill. That was it, until last night when the Minister of Public Safety spoke for half an hour putting out facts that clearly are contradicted by the reality, and then there were four minutes of debate from the opposition. That is the sum total of the last five years: three and one-half hours of debate and four minutes of opposition discussion on the bill itself. And now the government has brought in closure.

I just want to ask very simply why the Conservatives promised moderation, when on the floor of this Parliament they have delivered everything but.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, what is clear is that there has been excessive debate on this, not only debate, but also committee hearings in respect of this matter.

Bill C-391 in the last Parliament was defeated by various NDP members turning tail on their commitment to their constituents and voting to retain the long gun registry.

The interesting thing is the NDP will allow its members to vote their conscience provided it does not interfere with party lines. The NDP knew that the long gun registry would be defeated and allowed only so many members to vote in favour of abolishing it, because the NDP knew it would have no effect.

As for the 34 minutes of debate, I stood up yesterday to speak and the NDP opposition members immediately shut down debate. That is what has prompted this time allocation motion. They are not interested in the debate. There is an ideological bent on the part of most of them to ensure that this matter does not come to a vote, and if it ever does come to a vote and is passed, they will move to reinstate the long gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Madam Speaker, as an elected member from the province of Quebec, I am outraged today. The Government of Quebec recently took a clear stance. It made demands of the federal government, but the federal government decided to simply ignore these demands, which are very reasonable in my opinion. And now the government is trying to silence the opposition, which is made up almost entirely of members from the province of Quebec.

Why is this government silencing not only the Government of Quebec but also the members of Parliament from this province?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, our government made it very clear when we went into the last election, the unnecessary election, that we would be bringing in legislation to abolish the long gun registry. That is nothing new. It is clear.

We have limited the bill to a very clear question: "Do you want the long gun registry or not?" If we do not want the long gun registry, that involves a destruction of the records, records which relate to law-abiding Canadian citizens who were compelled by the Liberals and the NDP to put that information forward for no valid public safety reason. What we are asking the House on this particular bill is: "Do you want the long gun registry or not?" There is not a member in the opposition who has not already made up his or her mind. It is clear. We all know where members stand.

Now it is time for this matter to come to a vote. We are allocating three days of debate. If there is any opposition member who wants to speak, members will have that time within the context of those three days.

• (1035)

[*Translation*]

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Madam Speaker, what is fundamental in this debate is that Quebec is clear. Quebec's public safety minister did not know that the data in the firearms registry would be destroyed. The minister can tell us today that we should have known, but Robert Dutil, his Quebec counterpart, just found out and has said that he is officially and strongly against the destruction of this data.

In addition, Quebec's minister of Canadian intergovernmental affairs, Yvon Vallières, has said that Quebec also paid for the firearms registry. We paid for that data, in part, of course. If Quebec and the other provinces want to retrieve the data, I do not understand why the minister is stubbornly refusing to allow them to do so.

The minister is telling us today that he does not respect the provinces' wishes, that he does not respect the wishes of Quebec, which were clear: the registry belongs just as much to Quebec as it does to the federal government. The federal government does not have to keep the registry, but it also does not have to destroy it. Why is the minister not listening to Quebec today?

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, when the federal Parliament passed Bill C-68, which brought about the long gun registry, it compelled ordinary Canadians to provide information for a specific purpose with respect to a specific piece of legislation. The government cannot say now that it will ignore the privacy act or the commitments it has made in Parliament and transfer that information with the intent to use it in a non-authorized manner.

I have a lot of respect for the public safety minister in Quebec. He is certainly a dedicated public servant. However, I find it hard to believe that when the government said it would destroy the registry he did not realize that meant the data.

Government Orders

As I have indicated in my prior comments, there is no distinction between the registry and the data. The registry is the process of collecting information, which is data. To make that kind of distinction is making a mockery of the English language and the French language.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have two points to make. First, we are talking about the guillotine. For the fifth time since this Parliament began, the guillotine is being applied to important measures, namely, extremely critical debates that were central to the last federal election. For this reason, these debates must happen. The Conservatives are saying that debate is being limited because we have already debated these issues, but I disagree. The election was fought on these issues. As representatives of our voters and ridings, we must debate these issues in Parliament.

The only time I can understand using the guillotine is to put an end to debate on dilatory matters, where the sole objective is to waste time. That is not what we are talking about here. We are talking about key issues that are fundamental to the fabric of Quebec and Canadian society. I do not understand why the government wants to limit debate on the pretext that these issues have already been debated.

Second, there are also new elements. The bill talks about destroying the records. The registry is important for the administration of justice, which is an area that falls under provincial, not federal, jurisdiction. How can the Minister of Public Safety prevent the provinces from properly administering justice with the help of the registry?

[English]

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, I am having trouble understanding what new elements have been added to the debate.

When the government said it would get rid of the long gun registry it meant exactly that. The registry is comprised of data that was collected under compulsion of law. We made it very clear that we were getting rid of the registry so there are no new elements that have been added here.

As for the member's reference to the fact that after 34 minutes of debate we are moving a time allocation motion, let us make sure that the people of Canada understand what has occurred. The NDP engaged in dilatory tactics that would shut down debate of the substantive issues. Therefore, because we had made the commitment and the NDP obviously was not interested in debate we moved a time allocation motion and are providing three days of debate.

•(1040)

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is interesting to hear members on the opposite side of the House say that not enough time is being provided for debate when most Canadians could probably have the same discussion in an hour over lunch. Three days is more than enough time, let alone the past 15 years.

I ask the hon. minister, what is the number one issue his constituents ask to have changed with regard to our sessions in the House?

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, constituents are concerned with a broad number of issues such as health care, defence, et cetera. However, while campaigning door to door asking what should be changed, almost invariably the response was to get rid of the long gun registry.

It is an amazing issue. I ran in the 2000, 2004 and 2006 elections. In the 2008 election I did not put any material regarding the gun registry in my literature because everyone knew where I stood. As soon as I sent out my first brochure without any mention of the long gun registry the phone calls immediately started to come in asking if we had abandoned our commitment.

Bill C-19 is a clear indication that we have not abandoned our commitment. We are prepared to proceed with the bill.

Ms. Joyce Murray: Madam Speaker, I want to speak to the minister's inconsistency.

It is not true that the government moved time allocation on the basis that all of the elements have been debated. That is nonsense. When the minister claims that the data is the registry that is like saying the carpets, dishes and plates are the house. The government is saying it does not want to maintain that house or its location. The government of Quebec believes the contents of that house are important and wants to house them.

It is not only ideological but vindictive to deny other levels of government access to these records. The minister said that these records are part of the registry. The government said it would eliminate the registry. It never said it would eliminate the records. It is vindictive to now deny the province and people of Quebec access to that information.

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, Canadians need to hear those kinds of comments because they are typical of the Liberals' views on criminal justice policy. They want a process put in place but do not care whether it accomplishes anything.

The DNA registry is a good example. The Liberal government put so many roadblocks in place that no one could use it effectively for any criminal law purpose. We reformed the DNA registry because it was so bad and only half the people who should have been registered were registered.

The distinction the member is making does not make a difference.

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Madam Speaker, I heard the hon. minister across the way talk about the gun registry and that members did one thing or another in the past. The decision I made at second reading was contradictory to the one I made at third reading because the people of Welland decided that was what they wanted me to do. Therefore, the consistency that we have heard talked about that everyone is in agreement is totally false. Folks out there want to hear what the opposition has to say. They are clear with respect to what the government side wants to do, but they deserve to hear from us.

•(1045)

Hon. Vic Toews: Madam Speaker, this can be best summarized by the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore who indicated that he has opposed the registry since he was first elected in 1997. He said:

Government Orders

The registry itself gives people a false sense of security over gun control and gun safety—

NDP and government members have long since made up their minds on the issue. We are providing another three days of debate on the issue. If the member wants to repeat everything he has said and tell people that what he has said in the past is inconsistent with what he is saying now, that is fine, but let us move on because people want to know the outcome.

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1125)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 47)

YEAS

Members

Ablonczy	Adams
Aglukkaq	Albas
Albrecht	Alexander
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Armstrong	Ashfield
Aspin	Bateman
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blaney
Boughen	Brad
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Butt
Calandra	Calkins
Cannan	Carmichael
Carrie	Chisu
Chong	Clarke
Clement	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dreeschen	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Gill	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)

Hawn	Hayes
Hillyer	Hooppner
Holder	James
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Leef
Leitch	Lemieux
Leung	Lizon
Lobb	Lukiwski
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Mayers
McColeman	Menegakis
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
O'Connor	O'Neill Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Oliver	Opitz
Paradis	Payne
Penashue	Poilievre
Preston	Raitt
Rathgeber	Reid
Rempel	Richards
Richardson	Ritz
Saxton	Schellenberger
Shea	Shipley
Smith	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Tilson
Toet	Trost
Trottier	Truppe
Tweed	Valcourt
Van Loan	Vellacott
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Watson
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	Weston (Saint John)
Wilks	Williamson
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich	Young (Vancouver South)
Zimmer— 145	

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
Angus	Ashton
Atamanenko	Aubin
Ayala	Belanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Blanchette-Lamothe
Boivin	Borg
Boulerice	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brosseau
Byrne	Caron
Casey	Cash
Charlton	Chicoine
Chisholm	Choquette
Christopherson	Cleary
Coderre	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dionne Labelle	Donnelly
Doré Lefebvre	Dubé
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dussault
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeman
Fry	Gameau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Godin
Goodale	Gravelle
Groguhé	Harris (Scarborough Southwest)
Harris (St. John's East)	Ihsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jacob	Julian
Karygiannis	Kellway
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Larose	Latendresse

Government Orders

Laverdière	LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)
Liu	MacAulay
Martin	Massé
Mathyssen	May
McCallum	McGuinty
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Michaud
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot)
Murray	Nantel
Nash	Nicholls
Nunez-Melo	Paccetti
Patry	Péclét
Perreault	Pilon
Plamondon	Quach
Rae	Rafferty
Ravignat	Raynault
Regan	Rousseau
Sandhu	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Sellah
Sgro	Sims (Newton—North Delta)
Sitsabaiesan	Stewart
Stoffer	Sullivan
Thibeault	Toone
Tremblay	Turmel
Valeriote — 117	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[Translation]

I wish to inform the House that because of the debate on the time allocation motion, Government Orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

● (1130)

[English]

SECOND READING

The House resumed from October 26 consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to first just repeat the quote that I gave yesterday, from our former leader, the late Jack Layton, on this very issue given in August 2010 because it is an important context in which we make our position clear on the long gun registry and on this bill now before the House.

He said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians...[The Conservatives] are stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest. [The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down".

This is un-Canadian. This kind of divisiveness, pitting one group against another is the poisonous politics of the United States. Not the nation-building politics of Canada.

That is an important starting point for our position because the long gun registry has invoked debate in this country. However, contrary to what was recently said this morning by the Minister of Public Safety, who said that there was no valid public safety reason for the gun registry or for the information contained therein, there are contrary positions stated by those who are entrusted with law enforcement in this country.

For example, Chief William Blair, chief of police in Toronto and president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police said:

The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess, but they cannot know. It could get them killed.

Chief Daniel Parkinson, president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police, said:

Scraping the federal Firearms Registry will put our officers at risk and undermine our ability to prevent and solve crimes.

On behalf of victims, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime, Sue O'Sullivan, said:

Though there are varying points of view, the majority of victims' groups we have spoken with continue to support keeping the long gun registry

So what is the solution? We have proposed to make substantial amendments to make the long gun registry more in keeping with the concerns of rural Canadians, in particular, and also aboriginal Canadians. We want to see these legitimate concerns addressed while ensuring that police have the tools that they need to keep our streets safe.

We have been trying to find a way to address the problems with this registry but also further strengthen gun control laws. We want to continue to bring Canadians together and to find solutions, but we are dealing with the wedge politics of the Conservative government here in this House.

The Conservatives have added a new challenge. The challenge before us here is to repair the damage done by this divisiveness and to bring people together. However, we also have a concern as to the new element being added in this legislation, which has been in neither the legislation that private members opposite have brought forward here, nor in a Senate bill last year. That is the element of the reckless and irresponsible destruction of records that are valuable for public safety in this country.

Section 29 of this act would provide for the destruction of records, what we have referred to as a billion dollar bonfire. A considerable amount of public money has been allocated and used in building this information and database.

● (1135)

The RCMP was the holder of the existing underlying database, meaning description of the firearms, the serial numbers and the owners' names and addresses for currently registered, non-restricted firearms. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police wrote to the Minister of Public Safety asking that it be transferred from the firearms registry to the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre, still within the RCMP IT infrastructure, and be available to Canadian police as a searchable resource through the CPIC and NPS network.

They regard this as an extremely important piece of information that would support their efforts to fight crime and to trace firearms. They also say that one of the things that has been omitted from this legislation is a requirement for businesses to keep records of the sales of firearms.

Government Orders

We see, when we watch police shows from the United States, how police trace that information by going to the business owners who sell guns to try to find guns that have been involved in crimes. We need that information to be available as well.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has proposed that businesses keep a record of sales of non-restricted firearms from the importer right to the first retail sale, and that it be reinstated. It was there before the firearms registry went in, and the government is not only recklessly getting rid of the information it has but is also not making it a requirement to keep track of guns in the future.

Another thing that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police also points out is that this base of records is extremely valuable to Canada to allow it to live up to the obligations it has taken on in international agreements and arrangements to facilitate crime gun tracing, particularly with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. The association also wants to ensure that the firearms import and export regulations also be brought in line to ensure that these records are available in the tracing centre.

This is being ignored by the government. It is taking a slash and burn approach. It is slashing the protections that are there and is making no effort to improve the system that has caused some concern and irritation to rural and aboriginal Canadians, but it maintains the licensing system, because I think even this government recognizes that gun control is an important public good and that Canadians want to maintain it.

The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the New Democrats want to ensure as well that we have a strong connection between the transfers of firearms to ensure that when firearms are transferred from one person to another, they are certain to be given to someone who is a valid licence holder.

We put forth a number of recommendations in the past, and we will be putting them forth in the form of amendments to the bill. We put forth suggestions to address problems with the registry while maintaining its value as a public safety tool.

We want to ensure that there is a legal guarantee for aboriginal treaty rights so that aborigines are not treated contrary to their aboriginal rights. We want to prevent the release of identifying information about gun owners, except to protect public safety or by court order or by law, and we have had instances.

The Conservatives complain about the privacy issue, but they were the ones who released the data in 2009 for public opinion surveys, contrary to the notions of privacy that most Canadians have. We would want to make that illegal.

A continuing irritation of people is the criminalizing of the behaviour of law-abiding Canadians. We would propose not to make the failure to register for a first-time registration an offence, so that people who register their guns do not have to worry that by registering a gun, they will expose themselves to a criminal charge because they have not registered in the past. We would decriminalize the first-time registration of long guns, making this a one-time exemption so that guns could be registered and we would have a proper registry.

• (1140)

These are some of the things that have been serious concerns of Canadians over the last 10 or 15 years in dealing with gun registration.

The cost was also a factor, and the government has made regulatory changes to make registration free. We would want to ensure that it is in legislation so that no cabinet could change it without bringing it to the House. We would enshrine it in legislation so that gun owners would never be charged for registration of their guns.

I mentioned the issue of protection of privacy. We would also deal with the question of inherited guns. That issue has been raised on a number of occasions. People inherit guns through the death of a gun owner; family members inherit guns either by a will or through the administration of the estate. Sometimes it takes a long time to go through that process, so we would have a grace period for inherited long guns.

We also have concerns about making sure that only long guns that are used for hunting or sport would be classified as non-restricted. There are certain kinds of guns that manage to get through the system because of a loophole in how the new guns are now classified, so changes have to be made to protect Canadians.

The Ruger Mini-14, which was used at the Polytechnique in Montreal, was allowed to be classified as non-restricted. We want to make sure that the onus is put on gun manufacturers or importers to prove that the new guns are only for the purposes of hunting or sport shooting if they want them to be classified as non-restricted.

There are also loopholes with respect to business importation. We have the Canada Border Services Agency not sharing detailed information about guns imported under business licences with the registry, with the effect that guns end up on the black market.

Let me talk about the reckless and irresponsible decision by the government to destroy the information about guns. That information has been collected lawfully by the government, police forces and firearms registries across this country, and we are told by the chiefs of police that it would be valuable. We are told by the Province of Quebec that it wants this information to be used for public safety purposes in Quebec. It has said loud and clear that it has concerns about what the government is doing. This information has been collected with a great deal of taxpayers' money, and it is information that it wants to ensure is available for public safety purposes.

This is extremely valuable, useful information. On the other side some will argue that it is not complete. No, it is not complete. It is not complete because there has been a whole series of amnesties while the government did nothing to solve any of the problems that existed or to deal with the concerns people had. Instead the government used it as a political football, a political fundraising activity.

Government Orders

We want to see public safety protected. We want to see that the gun registry is improved. We want to see solutions that work for Canadians and we are opposed to this legislation. We want to ensure that any problems are fixed. We want to ensure that the information and the underlying data behind the registry are protected. We want to see amendments made to this legislation to try to bring Canadians together, instead of providing opposition, providing division, providing more concern by Canadians about their safety from guns.

We are at the point where we have the lowest rate of homicide in the country in 45 years.

I want to make an amendment before I finish. I move, seconded by the member for Gatineau:

That the motion be amended by deleting all of the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

this House declines to give second reading to Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, because it:

- a) destroys existing data that is of public safety value for provinces that wish to establish their own system of long-gun registration, which may lead to significant and entirely unnecessary expenditure of public funds;
- b) fails to respond to the specific request from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police for use of existing data in the interest of public safety; and
- c) fails to strike a balance between the legitimate concerns of rural and Aboriginal Canadians and the need for police to have appropriate tools to enhance public safety.

• (1145)

The Deputy Speaker: This motion is in order.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Madam Speaker, I want to speak to a few of the comments made by my friend, the hon. member for St. John's East.

He talks about decriminalizing first offences for non-registered firearm owners. I am one. I own a non-registered firearm. I have said it in the House before. I have been fighting Bill C-68 since 1995, when I appeared at the Senate committee on Bill C-68 when it was in Manitoba.

If the government is going to decriminalize the possession of long guns, then it is no longer the jurisdiction of the federal government. If there is a non-criminal element in owning unregistered firearms or to have them registered as property, it becomes provincial jurisdiction and no longer falls under the Criminal Code. If NDP members are going to say it is going to be a non-criminal charge, there is no role for the federal government to play, since it will not apply to the Criminal Code.

However, if the member is suggesting that it is only a small window for someone who is a first-time offender, whether or not it is someone like me, who has never registered, or someone who has just come into possession of a firearm through an inheritance, how would the member define what is a second generation?

Members in his caucus have said all along that they support abolishing the long gun registry, so the real question I have for the member is this: how will he allow those caucus members to vote?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, we are talking about trying to find solutions to strike a balance between individuals who have a particular point of view, such as this member, and the need for public safety.

We are looking at finding a solution. What we are saying is that for the first time, non-registration of a long gun would not be a criminal offence. We are looking at finding a legislative way of doing that through an amendment. It is not for me to answer the details of that right now.

We are dealing with situations in which people feel they cannot come forward to register their guns because they would expose themselves to a criminal offence if they registered for the first time. We are saying that we would not seek to do that. It could be a matter of discretionary use of the charges or the possibility of charges. There are various ways, administrative and otherwise, of doing that. The point is that we would allow people to come forward and have their guns registered.

If people are discovered with unregistered guns, they could be subject to a penalty if they did not register their guns within a certain period of time, but they would not be given a penalty for being discovered with an unregistered gun. That is simply what we are talking about.

• (1150)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Madam Speaker, I do not understand the Conservatives' position. They are insisting on destroying the information that has been collected over the years. The Conservatives have been opposed to the gun registry for many years now, saying that it was an extremely expensive endeavour. Now that the registry is working well and many hunters have told me that they had no problems complying with the registry, the Conservatives want to destroy it all. They want to take it all away and throw the baby out with the bath water.

How can the member for St. John's East explain the Conservatives' desire to completely destroy the registry, including the data that has already been compiled at great cost to Canadians?

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, I find it hard to explain what the government is saying or why it is saying it. The destruction of records was never part of the other bills that were brought before the House. The irresponsible nature of the government's approach to this is a new element and it is one that has invoked an incredible backlash across the country.

The minister went so far as to say this morning that there was no valid public safety reason to have this data. This is in the face of millions of Canadians who support the registry. Also, the police chiefs say that this is important.

We know there are problems. We know they have to be fixed. However, the government opposite has taken the position that there is no public safety interest in having this kind of gun control.

I find it astounding and reprehensible that it would go so far as to not only do that, but to say to a province like Quebec that it will insist that it destroys those records. The Government of Quebec has said that it will not comply. Now we will get into a federal-provincial fight by a failure to respect the wishes of the people of Quebec as described by their government to ensure that they have a greater measure of gun control than the Conservative government is prepared to support.

Government Orders

It is reprehensible and irresponsible. I think there will be a very strong reaction in the country to the government's plans.

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question which was previously posed. Will the NDP allow a free vote on this issue? As we know, many NDP members have stated that they wanted to abolish the registry. It is a simple question. Will the NDP allow a free vote in the House, yes or no?

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, what is clear is that New Democrats want to see an end to the divisiveness that the government has engendered. We want to fix the gun control system and we want to ensure that public safety is foremost. That is where the New Democrats are united on this issue. We are determined to ensure that the government respects the need for public safety.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased that the hon. member mentioned the tragic events at the École Polytechnique. They are etched into the collective memory of Quebecers and, for many, they are one of the reasons this registry was created in the first place. This registry is extremely important to Quebec and, mere days ago, the Prime Minister stated that his respect for the provinces is one aspect of good governance. In light of that, I wonder if the member could comment on the fact that, despite what the Government of Quebec wants, the Conservatives are going to destroy the data we paid for with our taxes.

• (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, clearly, the destruction of this data is an irresponsible act and contrary to the public safety needs of Canadians. In particular, the province like Quebec is saying that it feels so strongly about this that it is going to refuse to destroy this information because it believes it has been collected by taxpayers, including the taxpayers of Quebec, and that it wants to ensure that it has a higher degree of public safety and that the cost effectiveness of trying to duplicate this is prohibitive.

The Conservatives are showing a great deal of disrespect for the people of Quebec and the Government of Quebec. That is reprehensible and it is contrary to the kind of federal-provincial co-operation in which we expect all governments in Canada to get involved.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles has the floor for a very brief question. Only one minute remains.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me the floor. I would like to make a quick comment. There is a registry that everyone is familiar with—the driver's licence registry. It is not a catastrophe. Everyone is registered and no one makes a fuss about it. It makes sense. When you drive a car, you think about safety and you have to register. The registry allows us to know where people live, where they are. There is nothing catastrophic about it.

This is a fundamental issue. Quebec has spoken with a strong voice. The National Assembly unanimously voted to keep the

registry. I would like to ask the hon. member how the government will defend this position.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris: Madam Speaker, the registration of guns in an acceptable legislative framework enhances the accountability of gun owners to take responsibility for what can be in the wrong hands a dangerous and fatal weapon. Responsibility is engendered by the registry and that is why we should improve it and keep it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Madam Speaker, as the member for Mount Royal, I am pleased to take part today in the debate on Bill C-19, the government's bill to abolish the long gun registry. Like many Quebecers, Montreal residents have indicated their support for the registry and their opposition to its abolition at meetings and political forums.

[*English*]

The government's justification for abolishing the long gun registry is not unlike its support of Bill C-10, the Safe Streets and Communities Act. It has a mandate to enact this legislation. The disposition speaks for itself and all contrary evidence is therefore but an inconvenient truth to be ignored. Yet, ironically enough, the government's legislation to abolish the long gun registry betrays the very principles invoked by the government in support of Bill C-10, the omnibus crime bill.

Indeed, the two bills provide an interesting study and contrast that illustrate the incoherence and inconsistency in the government's approach to crime and justice, save for one common feature, the ignoring, marginalizing and mischaracterizing of the evidence.

Accordingly whereas the organizing motif of Bill C-10 is the protection of public safety, which we all support in the House regardless of party, the legislation to abolish the long gun registry would endanger that very purpose of public safety.

Whereas Bill C-10 purports to speak in the name of the victims, this legislation ignores the very voices of the victims themselves who oppose the legislation.

Whereas Bill C-10 purports to rely on the support of police associations, which the Minister of Public Safety yesterday in the House invoked in support of the safe streets and communities act, this legislation is opposed by those very same police organizations.

Whereas Bill C-10 was intended to combat violent crime, this bill ignores the evidence that the long gun registry protects precisely against such violent crime. In particular, it protects against domestic violence, community violence, workplace violence and violence against women.

Whereas 272 members of the House, including many government members, recently rose in support of a motion to adopt a national suicide prevention strategy, this legislation ignores yet again the evidence respecting gun-related suicide.

Government Orders

Whereas Bill C-10 would offload costs of the safe streets legislation on the provinces that must enforce it, this legislation seeks to eliminate all the data, to erase all the evidence that would enable the provinces, such as my province of Quebec, to initiate its own registry, an enormous waste of public investment by a government that professes concern about the registry's waste.

Whereas Bill C-10 purported to consult and consider the concerns of the provincial and territorial attorneys general prior to its introduction, when one reads the letter from Quebec justice minister Jean-Marc Fournier to the current Minister of Justice, it is clear that Quebec's views were not incorporated.

This legislation has been tabled without appropriate consultation with provincial and territorial attorneys general. So much for the open, vaunted, covenantal federalism which the government has professed.

I organized my remarks *seriatim* around each of these points and principles, the whole anchored in and inspired by the very facts that run counter to the government's proposed legislation.

First, in a manner protecting public safety, despite the government's claim that the long gun registry is a waste and does nothing, as it has been quoted as saying, it is checked by police officers across Canada an average of some 16,000 times a day. Therefore, the question is whether these police officers, the very people the government asks us to heed, are simply wasting their time when they tell us that it is a valuable asset again and again.

The fact remains that having such a database has been a valuable asset, to quote police again, for protecting and promoting public safety. Indeed, in Canada deaths by gunshot are at their lowest level in over 40 years. There were 400 fewer Canadians who died of gunshots in 2007 compared to 1995, the year the Firearms Act was introduced, and estimates directly credit the registry with a reduction of 50 homicides and 250 suicides annually.

Since the first introduction of stricter gun laws in 1991, there has been a 65% reduction in homicides by long guns, as Statistics Canada data shows. Most important, behind every statistic is a human life saved. How can the government look at this evidence and still maintain that abolishing the registry is beneficial to public safety?

Second, in the matter of protecting victims, we need only listen to Sue O'Sullivan, the federal ombudswoman for victims of crime, who said on the occasion of the introduction of this legislation:

Our position on this matter is clear—Canada must do all it can to prevent further tragedies from happening, including using the tools we have to help keep communities safe, like the long-gun registry.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

She added that “the majority of victims' groups we have spoken with continue to support keeping long-gun registry.”

[*English*]

In my own province of Quebec, a similar indictment of this legislation has come from family and friends of the victims of the École Polytechnique massacre, as well as from the Dawson College student association, both of whom I have met.

It is clear that victims groups are against this legislation, particularly in my province of Quebec. If we scrap the long gun registry what lessons, if any, can the government expect to have learned from the Polytechnique massacre, the Dawson College killing, and other similar tragic events.

Indeed, one of the most compelling statements in regard to victims and reflecting the voices of victims and the lessons learned comes from Janet Hazelton, the president of the Nova Scotia Nurses' Union, who said:

Nurses and doctors, particularly those who work in emergency rooms, witness first-hand the horrific injuries and tragic deaths that result from firearms. We meet the victims who fall prey to long-guns and attempt to save them. For those whom we are unable to save in spite of our utmost efforts, we meet their families whose lives are shattered by long-guns. We also treat patients on a regular basis who are suicidal or victims of domestic abuse. A rifle or a shotgun in their homes increases their chances of being victimized. We often work with the police, who accompany these patients to hospital, as they can access the registry to determine if a gun is registered to the home, allowing us to devise a safety plan for our patients. The RCMP has stated that dismantling the registry will save less than \$4 million a year, a trivial figure when compared to the costs of gun injury and death.

What does the government say in response to Ms. Hazelton, or is her voice and that of the victims for whom she speaks, to be ignored or mocked yet again as an inconvenient truth?

Third, in the matter of support from police, for the year period ending September 30, 2011, the registry had been accessed more than six million times. Again, this speaks for itself. If it were useless and wasteful, as the government contends it to be, and all these wrongful things that the government purports the registry to be, then why would our first responders rely on it day in and day out? Why would they continue to characterize it as a valuable asset? Simply put, as the police associations themselves have affirmed, the registry is an essential tool for taking preventive action; for enforcing prohibition orders; for assisting police investigations, as when the police recover a gun from a crime they can trace it to the rightful owner; for allowing police to differentiate between legal and illegal firearms; and for allowing police to trace firearms easily.

As Windsor Police Services chief, Gary Smith, put it:

...but it can save lives. Often we would search a registry before we dispatched an officer on a call and if you tell them there's a firearm registered, they're a little cautious, depending on the type of call. My detectives would use it quite often, anytime they applied for a search warrant or an arrest warrant.

• (1205)

[*Translation*]

As for the specific issue of the destruction of data, Denis Côté, president of the Fédération des policiers municipaux du Québec, said, “I am shocked that they are destroying the data.”

[*English*]

Fourth, there is the matter of protection against violent crime, in particular, domestic violence and violence against women.

Government Orders

[Translation]

For example, the RCMP estimated in 2002 that 71% of spousal homicides committed in the preceding 10 years involved long guns.

[English]

According to Statistics Canada, in 2009 there was a 74% reduction for spousal homicides involving firearms, from nearly three homicides per million spouses in 1980 to less than one homicide per million spouses in 2009.

Indeed, Pamela Harrison of the Canadian Association of Women's Shelters says:

The rate of spousal homicide by gun has gone down 69 per cent and we attribute most of that to the impact of the gun registry. Without question we need it in Canada.

Accordingly, while women are a small percentage of gun owners, they account for a high percentage of victims of gun crime. The long gun registry is the only way to know how many of such weapons need to be removed from a dangerous spouse.

Since 1995, the rate of women murdered with firearms by the intimate partner has decreased, as I noted, by 69%.

[Translation]

In addition, Paulette Senior, chief executive officer of the YWCA, added that "the threat of a rifle is often a significant reason that women don't risk leaving to seek help." The government has to do something about this.

[English]

Simply put, the number of homicides involving long guns since the introduction of the Firearms Act in 1995 has decreased by 41%, a figure that can be traced in part to the long gun registry.

Fifth, I will turn my attention to suicide.

Recently, the government stood with opposition parties to denounce the incidents of suicide in this country and vowed to take action. This statement of solidarity and support from the government is directly at odds with the bill.

Since the Firearms Act was introduced in 1995, firearm related suicides are down 23% as of 2009, and we know that firearms are a weapon of choice for those attempting suicide. Indeed, the number of firearm related suicides in 2004 stood at 475, which is 5.4 times the number of suicides with handguns. Again, if the government were serious in its commitment on suicide and the importance of having a national suicide prevention strategy, which I think it is, then it would not scrap the long gun registry.

Sixth, with regards to destroying records, this is particularly troubling for me as a Quebecer.

[Translation]

It should be noted that the National Assembly is debating the creation of a registry for Quebec as we speak.

[English]

The government's move to destroy records prejudices the work of the provinces that realize the registry is a valuable tool that saves lives. Indeed, that is at the core of what we are talking about, a valuable tool to protect public safety and human security.

In summary, what we have here, regrettably, is yet another Conservative policy that is ideologically inspired with a wilful and reckless disregard for the evidence. All the facts, the quotes and the statistics that are provided appear almost as a kind of inconvenient truth for the government, but they remain a compelling truth nonetheless.

As I said before in this House, whenever the government talks about having a mandate for the safe streets and communities act and a mandate for the abolition of the gun registry, the point is that it needs to be reaffirmed that all governments and all parties have a mandate for safe streets and safe communities. However, the question is on the merits of the means chosen, whether it be with respect to Bill C-10 or to the abolition of the gun registry.

The abolition of the gun registry, with respect, is without merit and an affront to the very victims whose voices the abolition of this gun registry purports to represent. These voices, however, are speaking for the retention of that gun registry to support the purpose of public safety, to give expression to their concerns and to save lives.

• (1210)

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want my colleague to know that I hold him in great respect in this House but I do have some concern with his language. It really shows what the Liberal government had intended when it set up this long gun registry.

In the part of the bill that talks about destroying personal records, he called that destroying evidence. When do governments or police forces gather evidence? They gather evidence when there is a crime committed.

However, gun owners are not criminals. They are law-abiding citizens in Canada who believe in the right to own personal property, and their personal information and records are not evidence. It is extremely upsetting to Canadians who are abiding by the law and who put their records out there to respond to the law that is on the books today to be treated like criminals.

Why does the member view law-abiding gun owners as criminals and their personal information and records as evidence?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I certainly do not characterize law-abiding owners as criminals. I am saying that the registry, which gathers information, has been relied upon by police associations and has been characterized as evidence that they can then use, not with respect to incriminating gun owners or law-abiding people, but with a view to enforcing prohibition orders, with a view to preventing the commission of criminal offences, with a view to tracing firearms to criminals who may hold them and with a view to protecting the public safety of all Canadians, including the law-abiding gun owners who fully respect the law.

We are concerned with the manner in which the abolition of this registry would end up without, for example, my province of Quebec having the capacity to engage in the proper information gathering that can then be used as evidence against the real criminals who are committing the offences.

Government Orders

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if my colleague from Mount Royal could comment on the statement by the Minister of Public Safety this morning who, in his capacity as Minister of Public Safety, expressed the view that there was no valid public safety reason for maintaining the records, which are now contained in the registry, when, as was indicated in the member's speech, the National Assembly of Quebec and the Government of Quebec want to maintain these records in the interest of public safety. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police has said the same thing.

How can the member square the statement of the Minister of Public Safety and these other factors?

•(1215)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I cannot square the minister's statement with, as I said, the evidence that has been adduced by the police associations themselves, who the government otherwise invoke in support of Bill C-10, and yet disregard their statements when it comes to the abolition of the gun registry.

All the police associations, which I have cited, state and concur that the long gun registry is an essential tool used by police when taking preventive action, enforcing prohibition orders or used to ensure the firearms are removed from an individual's possession when the situation warrants it, particularly in matters relating to domestic abuse, suicide related issues and the like.

The registry assists police investigations. When police recover a gun at the scene of a crime, they can trace it back to its rightful owner. All members of the House will recall, for example, that two men were identified and convicted as accessories to the murder of RCMP officers in Mayerthorpe, Alberta, in part because a registered gun was left at the scene of the crime.

That is why I talked about the use of information for purposes of evidence that then can be used with regard to apprehending the criminal and the prosecution of that criminal. It allows police to differentiate between legal and illegal firearms. Without information about who owns firearms legally and what firearms they own, police cannot charge individuals with illegal possession. This is to protect law-abiding people and distinguish them from non-law-abiding people and hold the non-law-abiding people to account.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I compliment my colleague on his continued work on behalf of all Canadians and, in particular, for his work on this issue.

One of the issues that gives me difficulty is the vindictiveness, and I do not know what else to call it, of the government to choose to destroy all of the information that the registry has gathered. I find that the most vindictive part of all of this. I can accept where it is going with its ideology, but I do have a problem with the government denying the provinces, if they choose to go forward, their right to do that.

We have already heard from the province of Quebec on this issue. The hon. member is a Quebecker, and I would like to hear his thoughts on that.

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for that question because it relates to the overall approach of this legislation.

The government says it has a mandate with respect to the abolition of the gun registry. The minister extends that abolition to eliminating the information and erasing the data.

My own province of Quebec has publicly objected, and the Quebec National Assembly, as we meet, is seeking to initiate a registry and rely on the information that is in the long gun registry for purposes of public security.

I do not know if the Conservative government ever got a mandate from the people of Quebec or anywhere else not only to abolish the gun registry, but in particular to eliminate the data in that gun registry. The government said it went before the people of Canada in the election, but that question about eliminating the data and erasing the information was never put to the people of this country. It certainly was never put to the people of Quebec. The people of Quebec object to it, and repudiate any notion that the government has a mandate to abolish the gun registry and in particular to eliminate the information in it.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to the member who just spoke, I wonder if he has been closely following the debate over the last 10 years or so.

Some of the statistics that the member is quoting are totally inaccurate. He quoted many things, but because of time I will give two examples.

The member said that it is accessed millions of times, and he used an astronomical figure. That has been shown to be a completely bogus defence of the registry. Those claims that it has been accessed 17,000 times a day or whatever, include every policeman stopping someone, maybe for speeding or whatever, and using the CPIC database. When the policemen puts in the person's information, it immediately counts as a hit to the firearms registry. Even though the policeman is not aware of it and he is not interested in the information, it counts as a hit to the firearms registry.

Policemen stop people many times in the course of their day. That number is completely without merit.

He compared 1980 statistics to 2009 statistics. The registry did not come in until 1995. The trends the member talked about were trends that were in place long before the registry came in.

Those are just two examples of how bogus those statistics really are.

•(1220)

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Speaker, I would ask the hon. member to consult with the police associations that he has been invoking in support. They have been providing the data that I have been relying upon today. They have been talking about the number of times they access the registry.

I did not say that for every single time the registry is accessed there is a consequential relationship to the whole question of protecting public security. I am saying in terms of the overall use of and instrumentality of the gun registry, it is accessed, some will say 11,000 times a day and others will say up to 17,000 times a day. We can pick whichever figure, but both come from various police associations and depend on the measurements they use.

Government Orders

The point is the purpose is to access it to protect the safety of the public. The purpose is to access it to save lives. The purpose is in order to understand whether we have to trace a particular criminal proceeding. The purpose is to protect against domestic abuse, to protect against suicide through long gun connections.

The access has to be seen with respect to the purpose. The information has been provided by the police associations themselves.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yokton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill.

I would like to take a moment to thank those who helped make this legislation a reality: the right hon. Prime Minister, for his leadership on this issue; the hon. member for Provencher, Canada's outstanding public safety minister; the member for Portage—Lisgar, for recognizing my many years of work on this important file and especially for allowing me the honour of taking her speaking spot in this debate; and indeed all of my caucus colleagues who have supported me over the many years that this issue has been before us.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank my wonderful wife, Lydia, who has been by my side every step of the way for the last 18 years as we have dealt with this issue. She has made the most sacrifice. I thank my staff, past and present, in Ottawa and in Yorkton—Melville, who have worked tirelessly on this file for the last decade and a half. I thank the many organizations and stakeholders who have provided valuable insight and support.

Finally, I thank the thousands of farmers, hunters and sport shooters for their patience and support over the years. Throughout the years they have packed meeting after meeting from coast to coast to coast to ensure their concerns about Bill C-68 have been heard loud and clear.

As my hon. colleagues may be aware, this is an issue that has been of deep interest to me for quite some time. In fact, I would like to tell a story about how this first came to my attention.

In January 1994, before the Liberals had even put the long gun registry in place, I was invited to a meeting by a number of concerned gun owners in my constituency. I remember how cold it was. It was -39° outside in the town of Preeceville, Saskatchewan. I got out of my car, walked through the parking lot and into a hall packed with people. I could not believe how full the hall was. I remember so clearly being overwhelmed by just how many concerned citizens had taken the time to come out on this issue. Obviously I felt it was something they thought was very important to them. It was not really something I had thought too much about before that time.

I was asked by the folks in the room what I thought about the long gun registry that the Liberals were proposing. I had not thought much about it and I said something like, who would not be in favour of gun control, because that was what it had been portrayed as. Right then and there they put a challenge to me. They challenged me to look below the surface at what the proposed long gun registry would do and what it would not do. They challenged me to look at what the purpose actually was and who it would actually help. In short, they challenged me to look at the facts.

I made the commitment that I would look into this issue and I did. I ended up doing a complete 180 on this issue. I had to completely reverse my position once it became incredibly clear to me that it was going to be a totally ineffective long gun registry. It took a bit of time to uncover the facts, but as I looked at it with my helpful staff, I realized this was not going to accomplish what it was purported to do.

Since that time I have worked for years to see the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry scrapped once and for all. It has taken a long, long time. I have talked to thousands of people and have attended meetings on this issue from Vancouver Island to St. John's, Newfoundland. I have lost track of how many meetings I have attended.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the many concerned citizens, police officers, hunters, farmers and sport shooters who have told me their stories over the past years. They have shared their experiences. They have been honest and forthright with their opinions on the long gun registry.

•(1225)

It has been a long haul, but in the end, through working for positive change, we have been able to make a difference. This bill, Bill C-19, is proof of that.

I am also very proud to be part of a government which, after working so long to deliver on its promise, is making good on its commitment to end the long gun registry. Despite opposition stalling, blocking and obstruction, we held steadfast in our determination to end what has grown into a \$2 billion boondoggle.

There are millions of law-abiding gun owners in Canada. These include the good, honest and hard-working men and women from my constituency of Yorkton—Melville, and across the province of Saskatchewan, and from regions all across the country. These are law-abiding hunters, farmers and sport shooters who feel it is fundamentally unfair they are being persecuted for their way of life. More than that, they feel as though they have been criminalized. They feel criminalized because they own a firearm. They feel criminalized because they may not have done all the paperwork. They feel criminalized because they think that even if they have done everything according to the law, they might have done something wrong.

I hear from farmers in my constituency, farmers who work hard every day and have long guns on their property. They use them in the course of their day. It is a tool. I am talking about doing such things as shooting gophers or other rodents and coyotes that may be going after their livestock. These long guns are tools that farmers use to protect themselves and their business. It is not right that they feel they are doing something wrong just because they have a firearm on their property.

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I also hear from young people who are interested in getting into sport shooting, which is part of Canada's rich outdoor heritage and one of our traditional activities. We have enjoyed it for more than a century. These young people feel discouraged from getting involved, again because of the stigma associated with the long gun registry. Healthy outdoor living is nothing to be ashamed of. We should be encouraging young people in these respects. These young people are missing out on participating in healthy outdoor activities because they are not sure what they need to do or how they need to do it. That is a real shame.

Of course, I have heard from many aboriginal Canadians. Hunting is a fundamental part of their way of life. They also feel they are being deeply stigmatized by the long gun registry. This is a way of life. That is no more deserving of stigma than any other honest way of life across this country.

For too long, law-abiding Canadians who own firearms have been made to feel like second-class citizens due to this long gun registry. They have been made to feel that they should be held apart, considered to feel like second-class citizens due to this long gun registry. They have been made to feel that they should be held apart, considered more dangerous and made to endure burdensome regulations. They have not committed any crime. They have not acted in any way unlawfully. Yet they are viewed with suspicion and made to register their long guns as though they had.

Time and again, we see how this long gun registry needlessly and unfairly targets law-abiding Canadians. It does this while doing nothing to reduce crime or strengthen our efforts to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

I could quote statistics to support every single thing I am saying.

I will digress for a moment and give a short example. Ninety per cent of the handguns in Toronto that are confiscated by the police are unregistered, and we have had a handgun registry since 1934. That gives an example of how the registry does not affect the criminal. It does not do anything to reduce crime or strengthen our efforts to keep guns out of the hands of the drug dealers, the criminals, the gangs. Our government has been saying this for years. That is why we have been working to scrap it for years. I stand here today to talk about this important issue. I am hopeful that we will soon see the failed long gun registry scrapped once and for all.

• (1230)

I have heard just about every argument for and against the registry that one can think of. I mentioned that earlier today. However, I have no doubt that there will be some interesting debate in the House with our colleagues across the floor. I am sure they will continue to bring forward points to try to demonstrate that it is a useful tool. When the previous speaker did that I pointed to a couple of examples of how what he had cited is not really true.

The facts speak for themselves. The long gun registry does not put meaningful consequences in place for gun crimes. It does not address gun-related or gang-related crimes in Canada. That has nothing to do with law-abiding gun owners who register their firearms. The registry does not prevent crimes from happening. The opposition places the gun registry and crime prevention side by side as though there were some connection between them. The registry does not

prevent crime from happening. I could not be more blunt. The creation of a list of law-abiding long gun owners does not prevent a criminal from picking up a firearm or any weapon and using it to harm an innocent person.

Over the past number of years I have spoken with many front-line police officers, the men and women who put their lives on the line for the safety and security of Canadians every day. Time and again they have said that the registry information is not accurate. Police officers know that it is not accurate. They know that when they walk through the door of a house they always assume there is a firearm located there. They do not trust the information in the long gun registry and certainly would not bet their lives on it. A tool that does not do its job is a tool not worth having and should be destroyed. That is what we are doing. These are good reasons to scrap it.

As an aside, the Auditor General stated in a report several years ago that 90% of the registration certificates contained inaccurate information. A staff sergeant in my riding tells his officers when they come on staff not to consult the registry before responding to a domestic dispute as it may put their lives at risk.

To add to all of this is the registry's sheer size and the waste of resources associated with it. When the Auditor General released her report several years ago and that was exposed, in the entire country there was only one editorial writer who still supported the registry, and even that person had reservations with respect to it. At that time, a survey was taken and 72% of people wanted to get rid of the registry. When the Liberals introduced it they told us it would cost \$2 million. Later on it was upward of \$2 billion.

There is no evidence that the long gun registry prevents crime, protects Canadians from crime or that it protects the well-being of front-line officers. What other government program has gone 1,000 times overbudget? That is unbelievable. It is bad policy. That is why I have fought long and hard over the past decade and more to see it scrapped.

I ask the opposition members what if that money had been better used to address the root causes of crime in this country? Surely, they would not have been opposed to that.

I will now speak to what Bill C-19 means as well as to what it does not mean.

First and foremost, Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill, removes the requirement for Canadians to register their unrestricted firearms, such as rifles and shotguns. In short, that means that law-abiding hunters and farmers would no longer be compelled to register their long guns and no longer be made to feel like criminals in the process.

Government Orders

Second, Bill C-19 would ensure that the records that have been gathered through the long gun registry over the past years would be destroyed. This is a particularly important point. Not only are the details of millions of law-abiding gun owners in this country which are contained within the records inaccurate, they are also a means by which a different government, whether provincial or federal, could attempt to reinstate the long gun registry a few years down the road. The commitment of this government is firm. We would not allow that to happen. That is why we are committed to destroying those records. They would not be shared, nor sealed and kept. They would be destroyed.

• (1235)

As well, Bill C-19 will maintain current regulations for restricted and prohibited firearms. Those firearms will continue to be registered as they have in the past and licensing requirements will remain in place. However, long guns will no longer be required to be registered.

I will touch on another point as well. I spoke earlier about how for many of my constituents owning a firearm is a way of life. I recognize that is not common in many parts of Canada. For people living in large urban centres, the meaning surrounding firearms can be altered. It has become less about a lifestyle and more about what we see in the media.

In many of our urban centres there is a lot of talk about gun crime in the media. That can make some people nervous. I cannot emphasize enough that the Conservative Party believes in keeping Canadians safe. We are delivering measures to ensure families feel safe in their homes and communities. We are delivering better tools for our law enforcement officers and holding criminals accountable for their crimes.

Year after year, that is the promise we as a government have made to the law-abiding Canadian families we stand for in all areas of the country, both rural and urban. That is why we are in support of gun control measures that work, and why we are against measures that do not work, such as the failed long gun registry.

I will mention some of the actions we have taken over the past five years to keep Canadians safer and hold criminals more accountable for their crimes.

Our previous comprehensive legislation, the Tackling Violent Crime Act, has serious penalties for gun offences. Those measures include: longer mandatory minimum sentences for gun crimes; tougher new rules for bail for serious weapons offences; mandatory minimum sentences for drive-by shootings; tougher laws to combat organized crime; and, mandatory minimum sentences for using firearms in the commission of an offence. These laws target real criminals.

I have said it before and I will say it again that criminals are not in the habit of obeying the law and they certainly are not in the habit of registering their firearms. They are the sort of individuals who use illegal weapons that have either been stolen or smuggled in from the United States or elsewhere. They have absolutely no respect for the law or the well-being of their fellow citizens.

It is those individuals who bring the good names of law-abiding gun owners into disrepute. They are the people who do harm to our

homes and communities. They are the people this government is targeting with its tough on crime measures. They are the people against whom we are taking action in an effort to stop them by using tougher laws, by providing better resources for police officers, and by holding them accountable for their actions.

That is how the government believes it should tackle criminals. It is the right way, the effective way and the sensible way. That is why we are in favour of scrapping the failed long gun registry. I hope all hon. members will support us in getting rid of it once and for all.

I challenge members to do the same as I have done, scratch below the surface and look at the facts. If they do I believe they will come to the same conclusion that I did, that the registry is not a cost-effective way of controlling crime or making our lives safer.

• (1240)

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated my colleague's speech, although its content did not surprise me.

I have many questions about our Conservative friends' position, particularly in certain contexts, for instance regarding Bill C-10. I am a member of the committee examining this bill, and we are currently hearing from witnesses called by the Conservatives, including some representing victims groups, to support the government's position on Bill C-10 on law and order, public safety and so on.

However, when the time comes to hear from victims associations that are calling for the firearms and long gun registry to be maintained, considering how vital and important it is, the government refuses to listen to them. Are their fine words only good for one side and not the other? Some people have explained how it feels to be a hunter, for example, and I understand that the legislation can cause some inconvenience. I understand why some people might feel as though they are being treated like criminals because they have a long gun. But does public safety not make up for these inconveniences?

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, many of the groups that appear to be opposed to what we are doing believe some of the statistics they have been given, such as it is reducing crime and is a useful tool for the police. When it is pointed out to them that is not the case they of course will change their minds. They will change their minds as well if they are given the same opportunity as we have had today to look at whether it is cost-effective at reducing crime.

Many people believe some of what the opposition is saying but nothing could be further from the truth. Therefore, I challenge all of them to take a closer look at this.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to the arguments made by my hon. colleague. If he were to apply those arguments to the handgun registry and the licensing requirements to purchase firearms, would he come to the conclusion that he is in favour of eliminating those?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I do not know if the member is trying to divert attention away from it but the discussion we are having today is on the long gun registry. That is what was put in place in 1995. The handgun registry was put in place in 1934.

Government Orders

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Yorkton—Melville who has fought against the gun registry since its inception. He was often the only voice in the wilderness, so we have come full circle. During that time he was the go-to person. He sent out publications and people brought cases to him.

I ask him to share with us some of the issues that people brought to him concerning the gun registry that they will no longer have to face.

• (1245)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I would have had more time to assemble all of them, but I will provide a couple of examples.

In one case a farmer inadvertently did not comply with the paperwork and reported a crime to the police. The police officers discovered that he had not accurately filled out the paperwork to register his gun. The gun was one he had in use at the time. He was waiting for a coyote that was harassing his livestock. That farmer was charged by the police for not completing the proper paperwork.

We must remember that registering one's gun through the gun registry simply means it lays a piece of paper beside it. Yet that has created a huge bureaucracy. Approximately seven million firearms have been registered out of probably more than twice that many in the entire country. The farmer felt violated. He felt like he was the criminal, not the people he was reporting who had committed a crime. That is just one example of how this has targeted the wrong people.

We need to go after the criminals in this country. We do not need to go after law-abiding people who are asked to do a bit of paperwork.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I heard the hon. member say that the opposition parties are making claims that are not true about the fact that the RCMP and police rely on the registry. There has been evidence that the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the RCMP have said they find it reliable.

I have had a personal experience with it which I am hesitant to mention because I am still somewhat fearful. I have had the sorts of communications which some people in public life get, and that made me fearful. I went into my local RCMP detachment and the officers checked the long gun registry and took into account that the individual had registered long guns. That informed their decision making and helped me protect myself.

I know members feel passionately on both sides of the House. However, I also know from personal experience that the RCMP officers rely on the registry. It lets them know when people might have guns in their homes. Obviously, most long gun owners are law-abiding and responsible citizens, but unfortunately, not all are and having the registry makes sense.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect, and I have a lot of respect for the member, but that claim is totally false. The RCMP does not rely on the registry. In fact, RCMP officers are told that if they go to a home for a domestic dispute, they do not know whether that home has a firearm in it or not. An officer cannot

rely on the registry. People move and 10% to 15% of the data goes out of date every year because of this.

We have to realize that there are over 200,000 people in this country who have been prohibited from owning firearms. Their rights are such that they do not have to tell anyone when they move from one place to another. However, for firearm owners, they have to report their change of address within one month, and some inadvertently forget to, or be subject to jail terms.

The police do not rely on this data. It does not change their procedures in regard to attending a domestic dispute or something like that. I dispute that basic claim from the member.

[Translation]

Mr. Matthew Dubé (Chambly—Borduas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague referred to people who are being treated like criminals. Yet people will pay for licences to drive their boats and they will pay registration fees. They do the same thing for their cars. Those people do not feel like criminals. People use those things in their everyday lives.

A lot less people use firearms in their daily lives. Why is it acceptable to have to pay fees and be registered in a system for vehicles, but not for firearms?

[English]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, this has been answered many times, but I will do it again. This is apples and oranges. When we are dealing with the registration of a car, that is under provincial jurisdiction and it is not part of the Criminal Code. However, if people do not register their firearm, they are immediately a criminal. It is part of the Criminal Code. It is a totally different situation.

• (1250)

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to echo the sentiments of my colleague, the member who kept the flame alive for a number of years when the previous government was forcing this on Canadians. I would like the member to differentiate for the opposition once again the difference between the registry and licensing. It seems to be lost on the opposition. Perhaps he can explain the difference because it seems to be mixing the two together.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, I wish I had lots of time to answer that question.

A licence is required and it involves doing a criminal background check, taking a safety course, jumping through various hoops and hurdles in order to obtain it. Once the licence is obtained, according to the previous legislation passed in 1995, individuals must lay a piece of paper called a registration certificate beside every one their firearms. That is the part of the legislation that was totally new. There had been an FAC-type licence in place since the 1970s with similar requirements, but the registration was what caused this thing to spin out of control and cost billions of dollars to taxpayers.

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this extremely important debate. For us in particular—not just for us, but for many of my colleagues from Quebec—this is a rather sensitive issue. Why? Because a big part of this debate centres on events that occurred in Quebec.

Everyone remembers this, or perhaps not. Sometimes I say that we must never forget the past, so that we do not repeat it. As you know—we commemorate this event every year—on December 6, 1989, a young man named Marc Lépine entered the École Polytechnique and, for personal and anti-feminist reasons, decided to shoot a group of women. Fourteen women died: 13 students and one secretary.

This is the first opportunity I have had to talk about this and I want to take advantage of the time I have to say that, indeed, we all have our own experiences, but sometimes we have to remember that the firearms registry was created because of the events at the École Polytechnique in Montreal.

I would like to read out the names of these women, because we do not talk about them enough and we must not forget them: Geneviève Bergeron, Nathalie Croteau, Anne-Marie Edward, Maryse Laganière, Anne-Marie Lemay, Michèle Richard, Annie Turcotte, Hélène Colgan, Barbara Daigneault, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Leclair, Sonia Pelletier, Annie St-Arnault, and Barbara Klucznik-Widajewicz. They lost their lives that day. It is important to remember that.

I understand what the hon. member who spoke before me is saying. He is speaking in this House on behalf of a group of individuals who are targeted by the bill in question and by the firearms registry as a whole. However, there are also people who are targeted by the implementation of this registry. We all agree that the registry was not set up very well and that it cost a fortune. Nevertheless, despite what I hear about Bill C-10 every time I am at the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, I realize that when it comes to the victims, no price is too high. Sometimes in life things are expensive and we deal with it, but that is not how we should look at things.

On this side of the House, we are trying to piece together all these versions and views. What I find unfortunate in the debate on the gun registry—as with many debates here in this House—is that the government is trying to polarize the debate. It claims that its position, the position of the hunters, is the right one and that others are completely wrong. Some people claim that the victims' position is in the right and that the hunters are completely wrong. But sometimes, reality and truth are found in the middle, somewhere in between, and on this side of the House, that is what we have tried to bring to the debate and will continue to do. Yes, I can understand the frustration of the hunters or of some aboriginal peoples who feel that this registry forces them to do things, but we must look at what the original objective was.

I will admit that there are some good arguments on the other side of the House. Sometimes there may have been some information that was taken wrong. Perhaps the registry is not completely wonderful. That is partly their fault as well, because in light of the amnesties granted, the registry has stalled a bit in recent years. It is perhaps not as up to date as I would like it to be, but the information in it is very important.

Government Orders

We know that, for very ideological reasons, the Conservatives have turned the firearms registry into a big issue, an issue of money or all kinds of things. Once again, the victims have been forgotten in all the noise. The government has forgotten that while it is talking to us and we are discussing this, we receive emails and messages from all sides. I am sure that all members in the House receive them, including the Conservatives. They will probably rise at some point and say they do not get them, but maybe that is because they do not look at them.

• (1255)

I receive messages from hunters, victims' parents and victims advocacy groups. They are asking that we not eliminate the registry. For a number of people, it has become symbolic. Some might say it is an expensive symbol, but we are being told by groups like police associations that, on the contrary, this registry is being used. Whether the hon. member who spoke before me likes it or not, and even if the Conservatives say it is not true, I tend to believe our police officers. If our police chiefs are saying they use the registry, I do not see why we would suddenly say they are lying. I do not think that is the case.

I was looking at the background of this registry and I discovered something odd. It has been used quite a bit to divide the two sides of the House, with one side being right and the other side being completely wrong. It is a major source of political division in Canada. Some have tried to pit rural Canada against urban Canada. At first I was interested in this issue as a person who spends a lot of time with groups that protect women who are victims of violence. These groups have taught me a lot about the firearms registry. Perhaps they saw this registry as symbolic, but they also saw it as a possible solution to many domestic tragedies. At the very least, it provides a sense of security because of the additional tools it provides to our police forces to help women in specific circumstances.

In trying to do my job properly, without being too entrenched in my own view, I have learned, since the registry was created, to listen to others' views, including that of the hon. member who just spoke. It is true that there has been endless talk over the years and that the same ideas keep resurfacing. But I am not convinced that the members on the other side of the House have listened closely to the arguments coming from this side or from victims' and police groups. And that upsets me.

Now that it is in a majority situation, the government is saying that it can abolish this registry. But before, the government knew that this move was not possible and did not represent the views of the majority. I have no choice but to point out, once again, that this government only represents 39% of the population. This is an important statistic. Approximately 60% of Canadians decided that they did not share the Conservative vision.

Government Orders

I find it unfortunate that the Conservatives are trying to say that people voted for them and that since they are the majority, they are authorized to destroy the registry. This time, they have decided not just to cancel the registry, but also to destroy it. That is a major problem. The government does not seem to be aware of it this morning, but I get the feeling that the next few hours will be difficult for it. I can feel a storm brewing. I do not want to be alarmist, but since seeing the reactions—and particularly that of the Government of Quebec, the province where I was elected to represent the people of Gatineau—I have various concerns because I get the impression that a major problem is arising. Why? Because the federal government wants to destroy everything. It wants to do more than just block access to the information; it wants to destroy it. It will be shredded or thrown away—like pressing “Delete” on the computer—to ensure that the data will no longer be available anywhere.

The Minister of Public Safety was extremely clear and unequivocal: that is exactly what the government plans to do. It wants to make sure no one ever has access to that information. Yet the Conservatives have been reminding us since the registry was created that gathering that information was very costly for Canadians.

• (1300)

Everyone here in the House can agree on that. Everyone knows that creating the registry was very costly. The Conservatives keep reminding us that it cost \$2 billion, but they forget to mention that most of that was spent at the beginning, when it was first created. When the registry was working well and running smoothly, it was costing between \$2 million and \$4 million, depending who one asks. Even taking the higher amount, \$4 million, no one would say that that is a waste of money, except our Conservative friends across the floor. Furthermore, our police forces and victims associations are telling us that the registry is useful. I will never convince the members opposite, because they begin with the premise that police chiefs are lying when they say they use the registry, that victims associations do not know what they are talking about, because the registry does not prevent any crimes. The problem is that we may never know if the registry did in fact prevent crime. We could go round in circles on this for quite some time.

When a crime is committed with a registered firearm, the Conservatives immediately say to us that the fact that the firearm was registered did not prevent the crime. It may not have prevented one crime, but perhaps other crimes were prevented at some point. A police officer told me that he felt safe when he knew beforehand that there were two rifles in a home. When the guy comes out and throws a rifle on the ground, the police officer knows that there is another one in the house. The registry helps police officers to be better prepared. Police officers truly believe that the registry protects their lives, whereas the member who spoke before me firmly believes the opposite.

Finding ways to reconcile all these positions is possible and we can do it. If we used our talents and our energy, not as my colleague who spoke before me did in an attempt to destroy the registry, but rather to find solutions that reconcile everyone's positions, we would all benefit from this experience. But that is not happening. On the contrary, the Conservatives like to divide and conquer. They will tell hunters that the Conservatives are their saviours; that hunters are no longer criminals.

I direct my remarks to all hunters watching us. I have never believed that a hunter is a criminal. I do not think that anyone in this House has ever believed that a hunter, an aboriginal person or anyone who has inherited a rifle is a criminal. If mistakes in the legislation have given this impression, it is up to us, the legislators, to correct them.

As the hon. member for Chambly—Borduas said earlier, we fill out forms and provide information on our cars and boats. This comment may seem simplistic, but it is true. We must eliminate the irritants. This has always been the position of the NDP, both the people who want to keep the registry and its opponents. I want to emphasize that I believe in this registry and that, if there are irritants, then we must work to eliminate them.

The destruction of data presents extremely serious legal problems. The hon. members may find me tiresome but my time at law school has proven useful. I am thinking, for example, about access to information. There are things that are unclear in the current legislation. The Government of Quebec has already announced its stand on the matter and other provinces may do the same. I do not want to focus exclusively on Quebec, but it is my province. It is the province that immediately stood up to protect its people and said that it was prepared to continue the registry. This information belongs to the people of Quebec. The registry contains information that is relevant to them. The federal government does not have the right to destroy data that belongs to all Canadians and that cost a lot of money.

I have said this outside the House and I am not afraid to repeat it in the House. I am not afraid to say things outside the House. I find the Conservatives' position to be extremely mean-spirited. It seems there must be a way to find time.

• (1305)

The Conservatives will succeed in abolishing the registry since they have a majority, but if the provinces and territories want to continue to use it, I think that our Conservative colleagues could consider that and allow these governments and territories to offer the service to law enforcement agencies and organizations in their jurisdiction who need it and believe that they need it.

There is no problem with removing the irritants and I do not think that the province of Quebec will want to get into long debates about hunters or aboriginal nations. But there is a way to keep this data without simply destroying it, throwing it in the trash or taking a match to it.

I think that this is a good time to think about it. This would be the time to have a mature discussion about the gun registry. We must stop focusing solely on the absolutes on each side. Maybe we should think about the victims of the events that led to the creation of the gun registry.

Government Orders

It is not a matter of casting judgment on hunters, aborigines or people who inherit rifles and other guns, but as legislators, this is our way of respecting people who are going through very difficult situations, like the events at Dawson College. People will tell me once again that the guns involved in this tragedy were not registered, but that does not matter when we know that one of the victims of the Dawson tragedy is still walking around with a bullet in his head. This victim told us, as legislators, that the gun registry is important. If we listen to these victims when studying Bill C-10, maybe it would also be a good idea to listen to them when studying Bill C-19.

We must stop focusing solely on our ideological speeches and on absolutes and try listening to what the others are saying. Women's groups feel safer with a gun registry. It does not solve the problem. I will not claim here in this House that it is a solution to domestic violence or violence against women, but it is a symbol of safety.

Once again, if we eliminate the irritants that are causing the Conservative government to be so insistent on destroying the long gun registry, I do not see why we cannot reach a consensus.

In conclusion, at times, we remember people and we express our respect for them. I am thinking of our leader, Jack Layton, who passed away this summer. In a moment, I will tell the hon. members what he was always telling us about this issue. I know that I will likely have to answer a question from the other side of the House about whether the official opposition intends to force a vote. The hon. members will see that the NDP's position is extremely logical and consistent with what they have heard in the this chamber.

The NDP's position is unanimous: we believe that there are ways of reconciling all the positions in a respectful manner in order to take into account the rights of victims and the rights of those who seriously object to the registry because of certain irritants.

I would like to end by quoting my leader, because I think it is important to remember him. He said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority [for me and] for rural and urban Canadians.

There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians.... [The Conservatives are] stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest.

[The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down". This is un-Canadian.

This kind of politics, which seeks to divide and pit people against one another, resembles the poisonous political games in the United Sates. This is not part of our country's political tradition, and I think that all Canadians demonstrated this when Jack Layton died. This is not the kind of political game we want to play.

• (1310)

[English]

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the 40th Parliament, when this came before committee, we heard witnesses from the police association. We also heard from individual chiefs from across the country. Some of those chiefs believed that the long gun registry served no specific purpose. Although the police association was involved, chiefs in other areas of the country said

that it was not the case in their jurisdictions. Also, front-line police officers, in their basic training, have said that they are told to assume that there are guns inside every door when they go there.

Therefore, the unreliability of information that is not current or updated actually does the opposite. It puts some police officers, were they to rely on the information, in harm's way in terms of this information going forward.

How would the member respond to those chiefs and front-line officers who find no value in the long gun registry?

[Translation]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question.

Based on the information I have, one person did say that to the committee. This comes back to what I just said: we can play the statistics game ad nauseam. We can decide that a given percentage of people or that a certain number of victims believe in it and a given number of others do not. However, I cannot help but think we should err on the side of caution to ensure public safety. Every day we hear that public safety is one of this government's top priorities, but when it comes to the registry, suddenly it decides to take risks.

No one would say that the registry did not contain any useful information, so they are going to knock on someone's door and go in for a coffee. Come on. Officers have to assume there is something there and they must be careful. Furthermore, any information, whether it is 100% reliable, or only 95% or 90%, is still useful information. As the saying goes, information is everything.

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague mentioned the classic argument we hear so often: we have a majority, so we can do what we want. However, I think it is pretty rare for a person to vote for a party and agree with every single aspect of the party's platform. So that is not a very strong argument. There are some nuances to be made.

My colleague from Gatineau brought out many nuances in her speech. I wonder if she could elaborate on other possible alternatives, instead of saying that, well, since it is not perfect, let us scrap it all together.

• (1315)

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, who, I know, is very interested in this issue, like the rest of us.

These are serious decisions, and we take our role as legislators seriously. So instead of having preconceived ideas, we try to see both sides of the coin and determine where the truth lies.

Government Orders

What could be done to take the sting out of this registry? There are so many ideas and I have so little time. For one, we could decriminalize the impact this registry has on hunters. This process could be greatly simplified and related offences could be kept out of the Criminal Code. That may have been a mistake when the registry was created. That is one of the dangers of creating something in the aftermath of a dramatic event. Sometimes things move quickly and we do not think about the consequences. I am sure that the legislators in 1995 did not think that people could be prosecuted under the Criminal Code. However, that can be fixed.

Instead of clashing and being in constant conflict, and instead of using the gun registry issue to raise money, we should be trying to find solutions to fix the registry and make everyone happy.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member spoke of domestic violence against women and that somehow women would feel safer because of the registry. I am trying to understand how many of the domestic violence incidents were specific to long guns and if the long guns were registered, how that might actually reduce domestic violence. I would like some clarification on that please.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, according to statistics released yesterday, there has been a 30% decrease in such crimes. Having said that, I am not claiming that the long gun registry has necessarily solved the problem. However, these are statistics that should concern the government. It should take a deep breath and rethink its strategy. It could also be a hero to the hunters in our respective ridings by going back to them and telling them that it has removed the irritants. At the same time, it could go to Montreal or Toronto and tell the people there that it has considered their views and that it has found ways to help them with regard to crimes committed with firearms and long guns.

There is a way to balance the positions, but it seems that only the Conservatives are refusing because they are wilfully looking the other way to avoid facing reality.

[*English*]

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Gatineau for her balanced approach to this issue.

I note she quoted the figure of \$4 million, which is the figure given by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police who run the registry, not the \$1 billion which is wasted and gone.

A couple of things in the RCMPs report on the whole firearms program are interesting as well. It stated:

Without registration there is a failure of accountability on behalf of the owner, and it is registration that drives accountability. Without registration, anyone can buy and sell firearms privately and there would be no record...Registration further helps to reduce the general proliferation of firearms. This is very useful in investigating licensed owners in the trafficking of firearms to unlicensed users. Without the registry it becomes almost unenforceable.

While it is not a magic bullet that will prevent all crime, there are obviously uses for it. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police, which is interested in public safety in this country, says the government should listen to that. Would the member care to comment on that?

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, that was pretty eloquent in itself.

[*Translation*]

I would like to draw the House's attention to a very interesting article by John Geddes that appeared today:

[*English*]

Among the arguments against the long-gun registry, I think the most compelling, at least superficially, was the indignant assertion that gun owners are, by and large, law-abiding citizens who present no danger to society. I know that's true. Why impose a registration requirement on them? I'm inclined to respond with smart-alecky questions about similar impositions. Why audit taxpayers when most dutifully pay up? Why ask drivers to blow at those RIDE checks when most are sober?

So let's stick to the registry for a moment. Since criminals didn't register, was the system useless? In 2009, Statistics Canada reported that in the previous five years police recovered 253 guns used in murders and, in fact, about a third were registered. Some had been stolen, some used by their owners, some were owned by the victim. In any case, registration records figured in the police investigations and trials.

They do use it.

• (1320)

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, being a former member of the RCMP, I know that most of those records are found on CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre. If guns are stolen and used in a crime, they are entered on CPIC. With regard to the registry, most of those guns are not found there because they are not utilized through that process. They are used through CPIC.

I wonder if the member could respond to the use of CPIC as opposed to the gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has a good point.

That is why I am saying that we all need to come together to find the right solution. Some people use the registry and others do not. Why prevent some people from using a tool they find useful, with the irritants removed? That is the real question. But the government does not want to consider an alternative because that would mean admitting that it has fought consistently to scrap and even destroy the registry.

We were unaware that that was the goal. This is no longer just about scrapping the registry; the government wants to destroy the data. The government should be forewarned. I have the feeling that this will not save a great deal of money. I would like to see the cost of the upcoming court cases between the Government of Quebec and the federal government, for example.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today and speak in support of Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act.

On Tuesday, the hon. Minister of Public Safety tabled in the House this very important legislation that would end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all. This was, and will be, an important moment for so many Canadians across the country who have been waiting so very long to see this happen.

It is also an important moment for every government member who has fought so hard against opposition blocking, obstruction, games, false accusations, and so many other sad attempts to stop ending the long gun registry. I am so proud of our government members, my fellow members of caucus in the Conservative Party, who have stood up long and hard against some of these terrible tactics in their commitment to their constituents to end the long gun registry.

I am especially thankful to our police caucus. We are very proud to have at least seven, I think now 11, members of the police force, either active or former police officers, as part of our caucus. They have also stood with us, shoulder to shoulder, in ending the long gun registry.

Today, I stand here proudly, a Conservative member of Parliament, representing the riding of Portage—Lisgar, together with my fellow colleagues to see this bill passed and to see the long gun registry finally ended.

With this new legislation before the House we will all have the chance to do the right thing and vote against the long gun registry. In the past, we have seen members on the opposite side who have made very strong commitments to their constituents, publicly, in some of their ten percenters, some of the mailings they have sent out and in newspaper articles. There are members across the way who have made firm commitments to their constituents to vote against the long gun registry, and I trust that when this bill comes forward for a vote that they will honour those commitments to their constituents, do the right thing, and vote to scrap the long gun registry.

Like my colleague, the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, I do have a deep and very strong interest in this issue. I want to say why this is an important issue to me.

I am not a gun owner, I am not a hunter, and I have only shot a gun a few times. However, I grew up in a rural community in Manitoba where guns were used by the people that I lived with. I live in a very strong Mennonite area and there are a lot of farmers and people who grow crops and have livestock. I know it might be difficult for people who live in large cities to relate to, I can understand that, but I want to describe where I live. In my neck of the woods, if I walk onto a farmyard and see a farmer carrying a shotgun or rifle, I would have no fear of that individual at all because he may be trying to shoot a rodent or a skunk. He may need it because there are coyotes attacking his livestock. He needs it as a tool. Just like many of us in this room use our BlackBerrys every single day as a tool, there are farmers who use it as a tool to do their work.

I grew up in an area like this. I grew up where individuals went hunting. They used guns for sport shooting. A lot of my brothers and my cousins loved to go shooting. It was a great activity for them to do with other family members.

When I decided to run for office and I had the honour of becoming the member of Parliament for Portage—Lisgar, ending the long gun registry was one of the top issues that my constituents brought forward to me. They saw the incredible waste of money, almost \$2 billion, that was spent on the registry and they knew that they were being blamed, as rural Canadians, for the horrific crimes and the horrific tragedies that were happening in big cities. It was wrong then when it was introduced, and it is wrong today.

I am very proud to stand up for gun owners in Canada. I am proud to stand up for sport shooters and hunters, and I am proud to stand up for taxpayers today to speak against the long gun registry and in support of Bill C-19.

Throughout the debate on ending the long gun registry there have been so many myths that have been perpetuated. I am going to take a few moments to go through some of the key ones and try to bring some clarity on these issues.

First, there is the myth, and it has been talked about a bit today, that police officers use the registry and the numbers have gone from 8,000 times a day all the way to, I am hearing now, 16,000 times a day. The myth is that they are using it in their tactical decisions, when they go on calls, and to actually look at how to approach a home or a situation.

• (1325)

Sometimes the facts do not always tell the truth of a situation. The fact might be that the long gun registry in the Canadian firearms database is touched or is hit 8,000 to 10,000 or 11,000 times a day. However, the truth is officers are not purposefully going in and checking the information, as the hon. member, who is a former RCMP officer, already mentioned.

Even if a police officer pulls over a vehicle and punches in a vehicle licence plate, an automatic hit is generated on the firearms database, and many times it is generated and specific queries are looking at the name and the address of the person being searched. A specific serial number or certificate number is not being looked at, which is what is associated with the long gun registry.

To sum this up, police officers are not specifically going in. The reason they are telling us that they are not doing it on their own, and that it is only happening automatically, is they cannot count on the information contained in the databases. The long gun registry is inaccurate in that there are thousands of wrong addresses, thousands of wrong names associated with the wrong serial number of a firearm. The majority of the time, police officers find that whatever the registry says is not actually true if they go to confirm it.

These are well-trained professionals. They are not going in specifically to look at the registry. It is automatically making a hit on the registry and counting in this so-called 11,000 to 15,000 hits a day.

Government Orders

I want to quickly read a letter that was just passed to me. The Minister of State for Finance just received this email yesterday from a front line officer. His name is Gary. The riding is Macleod, so it is in Alberta. I will not give any further specific information.

Gary wrote:

I am a serving Policeman and have been for over 23 years. I am a front line cop whose career has been dedicated to hunting and capturing society's worst. For the past 12 years, I have worked exclusively on a big city (SWAT) Team and have arrested countless rapists, armed robbers, armed drug dealers, violent gang members, and murderers, including one who was on the FBI's 10 most wanted list.

I know very little about running a Police department, writing traffic tickets, lifting fingerprints, or investigating shop-lifters...I do know about hunting armed violent desperate men—and I do it very well.

The long gun registry does ZERO to help me do my job. 99% of frontline cops that I know feel the same way.

I have received hundreds of emails from front line police officers. I have not received one email from one police officer who said he or she wants us to keep the long gun registry. I would challenge any opposition member to show me an email from a front line officer who is on the streets arresting drug dealers, arresting violent criminals. The reason is that it does not help them. They do not use it.

Now, they have told us what they do want us to do to help them do their job. We are working very hard with our Tackling Violent Crimes Act that we passed, and other measures, and so, I do want to talk about that.

I also want to talk about another myth, and again it was discussed a bit today; that is, that the long gun registry protects women and specifically protects women against domestic violence.

I come from a family of six girls. I have daughters. I have nieces. I come from a family of a lot of very strong women, my mom being one of the strongest women that I know. I can tell members with all sincerity that if I ever thought that I was ending a process or ending a registry that would help women, I would not do this. There is no way that I could do this. There is no way I could go to sleep at night if I thought that I was taking away something that would actually protect women. That is because I have looked at the evidence as to what the registry does and what the registry does not do.

The long gun registry is not gun control. The long gun registry does nothing to stop people from getting guns who should not have guns; for example, men who are going to harm their spouse or harm their family. The registry does not stop them from getting a gun.

Let me explain what would stop them. The licensing process, of which we are strong believers. Gun owners are strong believers in the licensing process. That is where individuals will go through a background police check. They will have to take a safety course. Many times, their spouse is actually spoken to and asked, "How do you feel about your spouse getting a firearm? Are you concerned?"

•(1330)

I fully support that process. If we can flag it, and there are times we cannot, but if we can stop it, that is where we can stop individuals from getting guns who should not have guns. However, once they have a licence to own a firearm, actually counting their long guns, it might make those of us around here feel better. Maybe we think we

are doing something but we are not doing anything by counting their guns.

There are things we can do, like licensing. There is also a lot of things we can do regarding prevention, working with families that are going through crisis and ensuring there are women's shelters, which we have done so much work on, but counting long guns of licensed gun owners does not stop them from using them.

I would urge the opposition members, if they are not aware of all of the issues surrounding the registry, to become educated, because when they understand what the registry does and does not do, they will see that even if costs, whether it is \$4 million or \$100 million, it is a waste of money and a waste of resources that could be used elsewhere to help stop domestic violence and violence of all kinds.

I do want to mention very briefly that there are things that we are doing to fight violent crime in Canada. We have introduced a number of pieces of legislation. Any individual who commits a crime with a gun should receive a mandatory minimum sentence, which is exactly what we put in our tackling violent crimes legislation. Some would say that it should even be longer. Our legislation has mandatory minimum sentences of four years. If it is a gang-related gun activity, it will be five years.

I hear from some people who say that maybe we should have even longer sentences than that, but the bottom line is that, in Canada, if people commit a crime with a gun, they need to be in jail and there needs to be a minimum time that they are in jail. I am very proud that we have done that.

We have also introduced our safe streets and communities act, which is another good piece of legislation that would help us in tackling drug crime. The majority of the time, drugs, gangs and guns are completely inter-related and, sadly, when we are seeing crime in our city streets, so many times those three factors are part of it.

We have also brought in tougher bail provisions for those who use weapons in the commission of a crime. We have delivered mandatory minimum sentences for drive-by shootings and we are helping to stop crime before it happens. This includes investing in the youth gang prevention fund. Our government is very proud of that.

We have also delivered on our promise to provide more police officers across the country. Police officers come up in discussion so often and I am very happy that we have a very strong, open dialogue with the Canadian Association of Police. We talk to police chiefs across the country all the time. We meet with front-line officers who tell us that if we put someone in jail, we need to ensure they stay in jail. One of the most frustrating things for police officers is to arrest a drug dealer or arrest someone who has committed a crime with a gun and then they get out of jail before they do their time. I am very proud that we are doing that.

Government Orders

Ending the long gun registry is part of keeping the focus on making our streets safer, not on policies and laws that do not actually prevent crime. That is really the point we have been trying to make all of these years.

Another very interesting statistic on licensed gun owners in Canada, according to a Simon Fraser report by Professor Gary Mauser, is that if people have a licence to own a firearm in Canada, they are 50% less likely to ever commit a crime with a firearm.

It would be interesting to go around the chamber and each of us give thought to that. If there are licensed gun owners in the chamber today, they are 50% less likely to ever commit a crime with a firearm because they are law-abiding citizens. The reason the long gun registry has been so flawed is that it does so much to focus on them and to penalize them for being gun owners.

I now want to talk about the third myth that has been talked about a lot, even today it was talked about, and that is the ongoing cost to keep the long gun registry.

•(1335)

I think we all agree that it costs almost \$2 billion to register just over seven million long guns. Right now, there are just over seven million long guns in the database, and that costs about \$2 billion. We can all try to guess why. Only the Liberals would be able to tell us what was really going on during that time. We do not know. That was also during the time of some other scandals, and we are certainly concerned about where the \$2 billion went.

There are at least 16 million long guns in Canada, which means that not even half of all the long guns are registered. Can members imagine the cost to register the other seven million to eight million long guns that are in the country, as well as trying to get this inaccurate information up to date? I cannot imagine, if we did not end the registry, the cost of trying to make it up to date, current and a database that could be counted on. I fear to think of what it might cost.

The Liberals said that it would cost \$2 million and it cost \$2 billion. Now they are throwing other figures around. We have heard \$4 million. I really cannot count on any kind of Liberal or NDP figures.

As we look at the actual cost today, for example, if we look at the government estimates, it is costing about \$22 million right now just for the federal government portion of the prohibited, restricted and non-prohibited, non-restricted firearms registry. That would be long guns, handguns and short guns. We know that the majority of those are the seven million long guns. We know that it is costing approximately \$22 million right now.

When the Auditor General testified a few years ago, she talked a lot about hidden costs. Her estimation was probably around \$70 million. From the work that we have done with the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and in talking to other groups that are called upon to actually enforce the long gun registry, the municipal and provincial police who are not receiving any direct funding from any government but who must use their funding for their policing, the hidden costs that are being passed down to different agencies is huge. I would say that there is evidence that to maintain the long gun

registry just as it is would probably be over \$100 million a year. Then we would also have to talk about re-setting it up.

The bottom line is the cost. Some people say that it is \$4 million and some say it is \$100 million. I guess we could discuss it forever. We continue to stand with law-abiding citizens in saying that is money that could be spent elsewhere. I think all of us would have great examples of where it could be spent, on deterring crime, on prevention or on treatment. There are many great ways we could spend that money, other than on the long gun registry.

I am extremely pleased that the government bill includes the provision to destroy all of the records. That would have been the intent of the bill that I introduced but it was not laid out specifically. I am pleased that we were able to see it included in the bill that the government introduced.

The fact is that law-abiding gun owners should not have any of their information gathered and kept by any level of government once the long gun registry has ended. I am very pleased that we can look them in the eye and commit to them that their information will never be passed to any other level of government, any other party that would like to try to use it to create a registry, nor will not be passed to any polling group. That information will be destroyed and it will never return under our watch.

I am grateful for the men and women across this country who have stood with us, supported us, sent us emails of support and said that they will stand with us, as they have. Some of them helped us get more Conservatives elected to help get the majority in this House. I thank the men and women of Canada, hunters, farmers, sport shooters and their families who have stood with us. I am very proud that we are delivering on our commitment. We will end the long gun registry.

I call on all opposition members to look at the facts, do not look at this with emotion or political skew, and support this legislation to end the long gun registry.

•(1340)

[Translation]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will not congratulate the party opposite on the speech I just heard. If Pinocchio were standing in her place, his nose would be so long it would touch the bench across the way. First, the hon. member talked about myths, and she suggested that police officers do not use the registry. I invite the hon. member to read the article in today's issue of *Le Devoir*, which says: "This data is useful to police officers—who consult it thousands of times a day—and was paid for by taxpayers", and it should go back to the provinces. It was the Fraternité des policiers et policières de Montréal who said that. They know what they are talking about.

Government Orders

I would like to talk to the hon. member opposite about violence against women. The mother of a friend of mine was killed by my friend's father with a shotgun. Okay. It is important to have gun control. I would like the hon. member to talk about safety. If we are talking about safety, a firearm is a firearm. Firearms kill. That is not to say that everyone who has a firearm kills, but someone might get killed. We have to be careful what we say.

[English]

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We have been fairly concerned about decorum in the chamber and ensuring that we are respectful when addressing each other in the House. For the member opposite to accuse someone of being Pinocchio and that his or her nose is growing is implying that the individual is a liar, which is completely unparliamentary.

I ask that you discipline the member and that she retract that statement, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair will review the blues on this matter and, if needed, will come back to the House.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Mr. Speaker, I have been working on this issue for many years. I am not sure what expertise the hon. member has but, if I were her, I would not refer to *Le Devoir* as a source of expertise.

In terms of violence against women or anyone, the member referred to a firearm that was a long gun. The registry does not stop any crime from happening. It does not stop a long gun from being used in a crime, just like a registry for bats, knives or any other instruments that can be used as weapons. A knife can be a weapon but a registry of knives will not stop the knife from being a weapon. Most women who are killed in Canada are killed with knives, followed by beatings and strangulations. If we want to look at registering weapons, it would need to include knives and people's hands. That is ridiculous, but I guess that is what the NDP thinks.

• (1345)

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member spoke a lot about her own feelings and emotions and those of her family and friends. I would like to present some facts.

The Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians had this to say:

—it is clear to Canada's emergency physicians that the gun registry has, in fact, worked and the number of deaths from inappropriate firearms use has dropped dramatically.... So we will now all be unwilling participants in a social experiment that will undoubtedly place Canadian lives at risk.

The Canadian Network of Women's Shelters & Transition Houses stated:

It is actually in rural communities that the rates of firearm death and injuries are higher. And because of their availability, rifles and shotguns are the guns most often used in violence against women....

The Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime said:

—the majority of victims' groups we have spoken to have made it clear: Canada should maintain its long-gun registry.

The RCMP and Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have stated:

—the long-gun registry: contributes to community and police officer safety and provides preventative and investigative value to law enforcement and the communities...

Why would the government want to eliminate all of the data that is absolutely needed by these people to do their work?

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Mr. Speaker, I find it quite interesting that the two women in the chamber who have asked me questions have made personal attacks toward me. I would like to assure everyone that when it was stated that I talk about emotion and feeling, it was not done in any kind of positive way. It appears to me that the member seems to be copying the methods of the former member for Ajax—Pickering who is no longer here. I would suggest that may not be a very beneficial tactic to take.

In answering the question, we are ending the long gun registry. There seems to be some confusion, and it may be that the way the opposition approaches commitments is different from the way we approach commitments. When we say that we are ending the long gun registry, that means the data. The long gun registry is not some idea. It is the data that has been collected on law-abiding Canadians in this country. I am very proud to say that we will destroy it. It will be gone. It will not be passed on to any provincial government. It will not be passed on to any agency. It certainly will not be left for the opposition to try to form a registry again.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the parliamentary secretary has travelled all over this country, across western Canada and as far north as Yukon Territory. Speaking outside of her own personal experience and emotion on this, maybe the parliamentary secretary could let us know exactly what she heard from Canadians from coast to coast to coast having been in those ridings herself.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Mr. Speaker, I am going to be very frank, and the opposition might not want to hear this, but I heard a lot of emotion from Canadians from coast to coast to coast. I had hunters, grown men, walk up to me with tears coming down their cheeks. Some may make light of that, but it is not to be made light of.

These are men and women who have been targeted. They know they are not criminals, they know they have been protecting their way of life, they know they love their families and they work hard. Across this country, long gun owners have been coming up to me and saying, "Thank you to your government, thank you to your Prime Minister, thank you for finally scrapping this", because they are tired of being blamed for the crimes and the horrific things that have gone on in cities. They are tired of being blamed and having their family members blamed simply because they own a long gun.

I was very pleased to be able to go to Yukon. I actually had a chance to do some sport shooting with some fantastic individuals in that area. The message is consistent, and I am pleased that we can finally stand up for them.

Government Orders

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this speech was filled with the same main points that are emblematic of this government's approach. Issues are always black and white. There is never any middle ground—we are always either for something or against it.

I heard the wonderful speech by the member for Gatineau. She spoke about the NDP's efforts to fix existing issues that are causing frustration. These issues are completely understandable. Our police authorities, who are represented by the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, feel that the registry is important to their work. I hear from police officers, shelters and transition houses in my riding, and they say that this registry is essential. Changes need to be made to fix the problems, but the registry should not be abolished. While it is true that the initial investment was excessive, the registry does not cost a lot now. It could be of great use and of great benefit to the provinces, which are responsible for the administration of justice. I would like to hear the hon. member's comments on this.

•(1350)

[English]

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of points. I realize the member was not in the last Parliament when we were initially discussing this issue and the NDP brought forward some of its suggestions.

We have not seen any kind of response to one of the challenges, which is that if anyone tries to decriminalize the long gun registry, it is impossible. The whole reason that it had to be part of the Criminal Code was that otherwise it would have infringed on individual property rights. One cannot just ticket people for a property; Canadian law said that it had to be in the actual Criminal Code of Canada, so unfortunately that would not work.

I also want to remind my hon. colleague of another aspect, which is that police officers would continue to have all the information regarding who has a licence to own a firearm. That means name, address, phone number, licence number and the kinds of firearms they are allowed to own; therefore, if police officers went on a call, there would still be a good indication of whether there was a firearm on the premises. Again, they will approach every situation as if it is a dangerous situation and ensure that every weapon is cleared out.

We do see this as a black and white issue. We do believe it is focusing on the wrong people. As legislators, when we see bad policy, policy this flawed, we have to stand up and have the courage to end it, and that is exactly what we are doing.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been involved with this file since I became the justice critic for my party in 2003, a little over eight and a half years ago. It is the one file that I can point to where there is very much misinformation, and I have to say that almost all of it is coming from the Conservative side of this chamber.

Any number of other countries have taken the same route that we have. Over a period of time, we have moved from total non-regulation of firearms to significant incursions into the right to own a firearm and how a firearm could be used. It has been a progression.

Today, if the bill becomes law, we will be going through a regressive stage. It would be a regressive stage for this country and a regressive stage in the international arena.

I will start my comments today by describing how irresponsible this move by the government is on the international stage.

We have signed an international treaty through the United Nations that requires us, starting in 2012, to report annually all of the small firearms in the country. If the bill becomes law, we would have absolutely no way to meet that requirement. We have also signed an agreement with the Organization of American States that binds us, again, to issue a report each year on the number of small arms in the country. In both cases, this is an attempt by the international community, and I think a reasoned and progressive attempt, to bring the trade in small arms weaponry under control.

We see what happens when it gets out of control. We do not have to go off the continent; we simply have to look at the massacres occurring in Mexico at the current time. Weaponry is being smuggled in from the United States and, in one case, transferred by a government agency.

We are seeing regular massacres, but these weapons could be controlled. The United States has come online with the agreement and signed it, and so has Mexico. We are going to see some reasonable attempt to control the use of small arms on this continent because of these treaties.

However, we would not be part of that if the bill becomes law. Again, it is grossly irresponsible. I have yet to hear anything from the government as to how it is going to deal with this problem. The government not only would not keep the records, but it would totally destroy the records. There is absolutely no way we would be able to meet the international requirements that I assume we signed in good faith.

I will go on to what the member for Portage—Lisgar terms the "myths" that have grown up around the gun registry.

It is false to attribute the figure of \$2 billion entirely to the registration of long guns in this country. That is grossly overinflated. In 2006-07 the Auditor General had a figure of \$900 million to develop not only the long gun registry but the registry of handguns and prohibited weapons and the licensing of individuals for the right to own a gun. It was a package. At that time the cost was around \$900 million.

•(1355)

By 2010, that figure was moving toward about \$1.2 billion.

The \$2 billion figure actually comes from one of the proponents of this legislation from the Conservative side. He has, in effect, made up numbers, making some gross assumptions on police expenses for using the system. It is a fallacious type of analysis in terms of any meaningful economic analysis of the use of the system. That is where the figure comes from, and again, it is grossly fallacious in terms of what it has actually cost.

Statements by Members

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety said we cannot believe any figures, but I am prepared to believe the \$4 million figure on what it is costing now on an annual basis. That figure came initially out of a report from the Auditor General. It was confirmed repeatedly in annual reports from the RCMP.

The parliamentary secretary sat in the same hearings I did over the last 18 months. She heard the RCMP officials give that figure on a repeated basis. She never was able to challenge them with regard to that \$4 million figure, nor has anyone else. Officials know how the system works. They know how much it is costing, which is \$4 million annually for the registration of long guns in this country. That is the current figure. That is all we are going to save if we get rid of the long gun registry, \$4 million. The \$4 million figure is from the RCMP, and it is valid. No one could challenge the RCMP on it at committee.

One of the costs the Conservatives never talk about is how much it is going to cost to destroy the records.

I spent a fair amount of time working with the people who work in the registry. They described to me what they are going to have to do. One of the costs in that \$1.2 billion figure over the years occurred when we merged the two systems. We used to have one system of registration of handguns and prohibited weapons and another, separate, system for the long gun registry. We eventually merged them around 2005. As we were doing that, we created a single system. That is where some of the problems were: when we did that, we identified a number of dates of registration and other information, such as addresses, that were not correct. That situation has been progressively corrected over the last five years.

We merged those two. To now take them apart is going to require an estimated two to five persons per year for a two-year period, and it will cost millions of dollars, because we cannot just destroy the whole system, because doing so would destroy the registration of handguns and prohibited weapons. It would have to be done on an individual registration basis, and it is going to take that long and cost that much.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I must interrupt the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh at this time. He will have 11 minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

Statements by members, the hon. member for Prince Edward—Hastings.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Daryl Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under the first phase of Canada's economic action plan, we made a commitment to protect Canadians from the worst effect of the global downturn with a massive investment in Canada's infrastructure. It has been a huge success in creating jobs and improving communities across Canada.

To ensure that all these projects were completed and delivered the maximum results, we worked constructively with communities and showed flexibility where needed, extending certain deadlines.

I am pleased to say that all of the numerous projects in my riding are near completion and many are under budget.

I thank all my municipalities, their leaders and staff for their co-operation and diligence in partnering successfully. Working together, we have stimulated economic activity, created thousands of jobs and the projects funded will provide lasting benefits for our communities.

This program and these projects are a win-win for our municipalities and for Canada.

* * *

MALVERN COLLEGIATE WAR MEMORIAL

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a week tomorrow I will be attending the rededication ceremony of the Malvern Collegiate War Memorial in my riding of Beaches—East York. This cenotaph bears the names of the 25 boys of Malvern, boys who graduated from this high school and went off to fight and die in the first world war.

This cenotaph, originally dedicated in 1922, represents stories of incredible courage, irrecoverable loss and the enduring value of peace.

In my view, there can be no better place for such symbolism than perched, as it is, above the student population of a high school. May the lessons that emerge from the fate of the boys of Malvern not be lost on today's boys and girls of Malvern.

My thanks to, and admiration for, all those who organized and all those who donated to the war memorial restoration campaign.

If there be the 25 boys of Malvern watching next week's ceremony from on high, may they know that they have not been forgotten and rest assured that they did not die in vain.

* * *

GOVERNMENT OF CANADA

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has introduced legislation to end the long gun registry, bringing to a close a decade long irritant for law-abiding farmers and hunters. We are closing the door on a \$2 billion boondoggle and fulfilling our campaign promise.

Our government is following through on its commitments: cutting the GST from 7% to 5%; supporting choice in child care; fixing the broken immigration system; passing laws to make our streets and homes safer; rebuilding our armed forces; re-establishing Canada's place on the world stage; introducing a low tax plan for jobs and growth; and guiding Canada through the worst global recession since the 1930s.

Our government is fulfilling our commitments, delivering results and getting things done for Canadians.

*Statements by Members***PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE**

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure members in this chamber can remember a teacher who played a critical role in their life, someone who taught them how to think, helped them feel good about themselves and encouraged them to continuously strive to do better.

I would like to congratulate Vancouver Quadra constituent Laurie Cassie and her colleague Rebecca Robins for being that kind of teacher and for winning the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence. That is like winning the Nobel Prize for teaching.

Laurie and Rebecca are passionate about innovative and collaborative teaching techniques and about using digital media to help their students excel. Here is how a parent at David Livingstone Elementary School in Vancouver put it:

Laurie...and Rebecca...have been instrumental in transforming our son's world-view. School is no longer a torment, but a rich adventure, where he feels his contribution is valued and his ideas respected.

That is what great teachers do.

It gives me immense pride to congratulate Laurie Cassie and Rebecca Robins on a job very well done. On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to extend my thanks to them.

* * *

• (1405)

CANADA-UKRAINE PARLIAMENTARY PROGRAM

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Canada-Ukraine Parliamentary Program for 21 years of excellence.

Thirty-five young emissaries, including Stanislava Tsarkova, embracing the highest ideals of achievement and community service, have journeyed to Canada to gain valuable perspective and experience Canada's most important democratic institution, the Parliament of Canada.

They bore witness to two issues in Parliament this past week: a debate on democracy and a foreign affairs committee meeting exploring the political chicanery in Ukraine.

Ukraine's youthful ambassadors, Ukraine's future, must return with this message: Canada and Ukraine are inextricably linked by prior migration.

Canada was there for Ukraine, recognizing independence in 1991. I was there for the Orange Revolution, giving support to Ukraine's wish for electoral democracy.

Once again democracy is on trial. The people of Ukraine must not let the world-renowned example of democratic resolve of the Orange Revolution slip away.

* * *

PANTELIS KALAMARIS

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, some 50 years ago, a young Pantelis Kalamaris had the courage to leave his family in Greece and come to Canada for a better life. His

new life was not easy. With only a basic education, Peter, as he came to be known, found work doing anything from picking tomatoes to doing dishes. He saved enough money to support his family in Greece, get married, buy a house, earn his Canadian citizenship and bring his siblings to Canada.

In 1961 he opened Peter's Barber Shop in Weston. Thousands of people have sat in his barber's chair, actors, hockey players, politicians and everyday people. They listened to his stories of Greece and hockey. His shop became famous, with appearances on both national and local media.

Often referred to as hockey's other hall of fame, Peter's Barber Shop will host the Stanley Cup in honour of the shop's 50th anniversary, this Saturday, October 29.

Sadly, he will not be there to see this. On October 3, Peter, at age 76, passed away. The Kalamaris family has lost its patriarch, Weston a local legend and Canada a remarkable citizen. Godspeed, Peter Kalamaris.

* * *

CANADA-POLAND YOUTH INTERNSHIP SOCIETY

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2009 I personally met with the Canada-Poland Friendship Group in the Polish parliament when I was in Warsaw. The feedback from those meetings indicated that there was a definite willingness to create a bilateral intern exchange program between our parliaments.

Today I rise to bring attention to the creation of the Canada-Poland Youth Internship Society, created for the purpose of establishing a youth parliamentary internship exchange program between Canada and Poland. This internship will offer young Poles a unique, first hand public service experience in the office of a Canadian lawmaker in order to learn about the Canadian parliamentary system of governance, about Canada and Canadians.

Similarly, Canadian youth will get to experience a once in a lifetime opportunity to work in the Polish parliament.

I would like to thank the membership of the Canada-Poland working group, now the society, for volunteering its time and energy to get this program off the ground. I extend special thanks to our chair, Tony Muszynski, our vice chair, Teresa Berezowski, and members Jerzy Barycki, José Semrau, Ludwik Klimkowski and Danuta Tardif.

I know I can count on all parliamentarians to help work toward building closer political, economic and cultural ties between Canada and Poland.

Statements by Members

[Translation]

• (1410)

EXPORAIL

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Montérégie, October is dedicated to museums. Our museums are going through some tough times, and I would like to point out that Exporail in Saint-Constant is celebrating its 50th anniversary this year. This museum has the largest collection of railway equipment in Canada. Through these collections, Canadians can learn about and understand the important role that the railway played in the creation and history of our country.

I would remind the House that a motion was adopted in February 2007 calling on the government to grant this museum national museum status. However, the heritage minister refused to grant this recognition, claiming that he did not want to set a precedent, that is, to create a national museum outside of Ottawa. Nevertheless, he had the nerve to recognize two other museums in the ridings of his Conservative colleagues just a few months later.

It is the duty of this government to correct this injustice and grant Exporail national museum status, so that it can ensure the future of its collection.

* * *

[English]

BAY OF FUNDY

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

Where the tide rip swirls
And ducks do whirl
And old Neptune calls the numbers

I know that Stan Rodgers would agree that the Bay of Fundy
Is one of the world's seven wonders.

Twice a day in the Bay
The low tide leaves ships dry at the dock
And if you venture out to the flats you have to keep an eye on the clock

Because when the tide turns and the water churn...it moves with massive speed
and great power.

When the highest Tides in the world flow into the Bay it fills in less than a half hour.

So we ask all of you who sit in this Legislature

To go to myfundy.com and vote for a New Seventh Wonder of Nature.

Again, that is myfundy.com to vote for a piece of Canadian Heaven

Or if you wish you can vote on your phone, text FUNDY at 77077

The Bay needs your vote any time any place
You can vote Monday through Sunday

Together we will win the day
Mr. Speaker, please vote for the Bay of Fundy.

[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the opposition members say they listen to Quebecers' opinions, but that is not true. A recent poll by Léger Marketing shows that the majority of Quebecers feel that our justice system focuses too much on rehabilitation and 77% believe that crimes are not being adequately punished. More than 75% of Quebecers would like our justice system to be harsher with adult criminals and nearly half of all Quebecers want harsher sentences for young offenders.

Unlike the opposition, our government is listening to Quebecers and has once again kept its promise by introducing the bill entitled Safe Streets and Communities Act. In the meantime, the opposition continues to claim the contrary. Clearly the NDP is not fit to govern this country. Our Conservative government, as always, is listening and keeping its promises.

* * *

[English]

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last weekend I attended a meeting in Serpent River First Nation where stakeholder groups, such as the East Algoma Chiefs, Mayors and Reeves, the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains and Transport Pontiac-Renfrew committed their efforts to saving a critical stretch of rail in eastern Ontario. While CP has started lifting tracks between Pembroke and Smith's Falls, there is still hope to save the line from Pembroke eastward, preserving northeastern Ontario's freight and passenger link to Ottawa, Montreal and the eastern seaboard in the process.

East Algoma Chiefs, Mayors and Reeves passed a resolution in support of saving the Mattawa to Pembroke line and will be contacting other municipalities to encourage them to do the same. Serpent River First Nation Chief Isadore Day has been appointed as its delegate to raise this issue at upcoming municipal meetings on Ontario's northern growth plan.

Trains are an effective transportation option that is important to our economy, quality of life and also environmentally beneficial.

[Translation]

I encourage this government to work with the many groups involved in order to help preserve this crucial infrastructure and our transportation options.

* * *

[English]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand and tell my constituents that our government has delivered on another one of our commitments to Canadians. Today the Minister of State for Democratic Reform introduced Bill C-20, Fair Representation Act.

Statements by Members

During the last federal general election, we promised to ensure that any update to the formula allocating House of Commons seats would be fair to all the provinces. We committed to increase the number of seats for faster-growing provinces and to protect the number of seats for smaller provinces.

This bill is principled and fair and it will move every province closer toward representation by population. I am proud to say that this bill will deliver on our Conservative government's long-standing commitment to Canadians.

* * *

LIBYA

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize and commend the outstanding job done by Canada's Lieutenant-General Charles Bouchard in Libya. He has given Canadians great cause for pride, not only because he was entrusted by the international community to command NATO's forces in Libya, but also because of his skill in prosecuting the mission.

As we learned throughout the conflict, the Lieutenant-General was rigorous and unwavering in his concern to avoid civilian casualties and to protect innocent people. For this, he garnered the trust of the NATO members and, most important, the people of Libya.

Lieutenant-General Bouchard's rigour was matched by the discipline of our air and naval officers. Their contributions to the success of the Libya mission equalled that of the Lieutenant-General in their compassion and concern for the lives of the Libyan people. Hopefully, it will stand as a model for future military interventions.

* * *

• (1415)

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw attention to comments the Prime Minister made in Perth today to business leaders from around the Commonwealth. As Europe appears to have reached a plan for dealing with its sovereign debt crisis, the Prime Minister described this crisis as "the most immediate and imminent threat to global recovery". Our government is cautiously optimistic about these new positive steps from Europe.

Meanwhile, here at home our Conservative government remains focused on the priorities of Canadians, and that is jobs and the economy. Since July 2009, Canada's economy has created over 650,000 new jobs. However, our work is still not done. There are still far too many Canadians out of work. That is why we are implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan and its job-creating measures like the hiring credit for small business.

Our low tax for jobs and growth plan is working very well.

* * *

DISTINGUISHED COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Mr. Tyrone Benskin (Jeanne-Le Ber, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the recipients of the Quebec Community Groups Network's 2011 Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Award.

This year, three exemplary women, Ms. Joan Ivory, Ms. Gemma Raeburn-Baynes and Ms. Aline Visser, were recognized for their lifetime of selfless service in volunteerism to the cities and regions of Quebec. These distinguished women are a shining example of how anglophone Quebecers have dedicated themselves to the vitality of their communities and the richness of Quebec society.

The award namesakes, Sheila and Victor Goldbloom, have themselves demonstrated their passion for giving for much of their 63 years together. They, and many other anglophone Quebecers who work alongside their dedicated French counterparts, make Quebec the most special and unique part of Canada.

I congratulate these individuals and the QCGN for their tireless work throughout Quebec and their success at building bridges among their neighbours. Their work recognizes the fact that as Québécois and Québécoise we are all one and that, through their efforts and such dedicated individuals and organizations, we can celebrate the beauty, passion and strength that is Quebec.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the disunited NDP does not agree on much. Those members are all over the map on the Wheat Board, shipbuilding, bilingual judges, and joint nomination meetings with the Liberals, but Canadians can rest assured they are still united on a major issue.

Given the chance, the NDP would raise taxes on all Canadians. Last week senior backroom strategist and big union leadership candidate Brian Topp called for higher taxes on the wealthy.

This week the NDP interim leader clarified who the NDP think are wealthy when she proposed raising taxes on so-called wealthy Canadians with tax-free savings accounts, 6.7 million Canadians of whom more than 80% are in the lowest two income brackets.

The NDP wants to hike taxes on all Canadians and opposes Canadians who save their hard-earned money.

The NDP's opposition to Canadians saving their hard-earned money is yet another worrying example that the NDP is not fit to govern.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the Prime Minister has time, I suggest he tour the Australian wheat board. This once-proud single desk marketer benefited family farmers for decades before a reckless conservative government dismantled it. How did that work out? Wheat growers lost leverage, countless family farms failed, and the defunct board was sold off to an offshore big agri-company.

Why is the government repeating that failed experiment?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is we are focused on the Canadian Wheat Board.

The truth of the matter is, Canadian wheat growers for years have sought freedom to market their own product.

It is unfortunate that the NDP is trying to use undemocratic measures, dirty tricks and intimidation.

What western wheat farmers want is freedom. That is what they will get with the Conservative government.

* * *

[Translation]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the National Assembly of Quebec has supported the firearms registry on more than one occasion. Today, we have learned that Quebec opposes the Conservatives' plan to destroy the data. The National Assembly is saying "no" to this government because the police need this information to keep our communities safe. That is what the police want and that is what the Government of Quebec and the provinces want.

Why is this government going to war against the police and the provinces?

• (1420)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the requirements for obtaining a firearm licence, including a criminal background check, are still in place. The long gun registry was costly and useless and did not protect Canadians. That is the reality. That is why our government is finished with the firearms registry.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not what the police and the provinces are saying. The homicide rate in Canada is the lowest it has been in 45 years, mainly as a result of fewer gun-related deaths. It is important to note that this decline is related in part to the firearms registry, which is consulted by police 17,000 times a day. The elimination of the registry is a problem, but the destruction of the data is even worse.

Why prevent the police and the provinces from accessing the data currently found in the firearms registry?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The bill also provides for the elimination of inaccurate and unreliable data. This situation is only getting worse

with time. The police are entitled to their opinion but the reality is that this registry does not work.

[English]

We have seen there is no connection with the lowering of crime rates; the lowering of these statistics has no correlation with gun registration.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is clear from that answer the government does not have one good reason for blocking the provinces from protecting their citizens. It is not just provinces that find the government reckless; it is also law enforcement. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police says that the complete loss of the firearms database would severely reduce the ability of police to trace guns in this country.

Why is the government, in face of overwhelming evidence and opposition, moving forward with this reckless anti-police agenda and destroying life-saving data?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, the front-line officers have spoken very clearly on this matter. They recognize the mandate our government has received from the Canadian people and they are quite satisfied with the efforts this government has made on behalf of front-line police officers.

What they are asking that member and his party to do is to support Bill C-10, which contains measures that in fact are targeted against criminals and those who would abuse Canadian victims.

It is time the member stopped picking on farmers and sport shooters and hunters and started standing up for victims.

Mr. Jack Harris (St. John's East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's reckless move is already creating chaos, stripping a life-saving tool that is used 17,000 times a day by police. Provinces are already saying they will not comply. There is mounting opposition from police, mounting opposition from provinces.

Why does the government not recognize the mounting opposition, transfer the data to the provinces and, as have the police have asked, to the Canadian National Firearms Tracing Centre? What does the government have against our police forces?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the figure he just mentioned is misleading. In fact, if he actually wants to hear from a government that believes the long gun registry accomplishes nothing, he should go to the provincial NDP in Manitoba which said that it does not care about the data destruction because it does not support the long gun registry because it is not effective.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the spokesman for the government could indicate clearly whether the Prime Minister will be telling his colleagues in Perth at the Commonwealth conference that as far as Canada is concerned, human rights include gay rights and the Prime Minister will be using precisely that language to describe the situation.

Oral Questions

● (1425)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly assure the questioner from the Liberal Party that on every occasion that the Prime Minister engages on the international scene, particularly on occasions where he is speaking with other leaders as he is doing in Perth, the issue of human rights is always there. The issue of human rights is something closely associated with our country and with our government. It is something we are very proud to put forward both internationally and here at home.

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence still does not appear to be able to use the word “gay”. That is the question I am asking and that is what I am relating to. I would like—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The member for Toronto Centre has the floor.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of National Defence regarding Sri Lanka. Apparently the Prime Minister is going to be taking a position with respect to the human rights record of the government of Sri Lanka. The government opposite has not always been consistent on this question. With respect to the situation in Sri Lanka, as the minister is being prompted by his colleague next to him, I would ask him very directly, can he tell us that it is the position of the Government of Canada that there need to be minimum standards for membership in the Commonwealth?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, quite to the contrary of what the interim leader has just said, the reality is the Prime Minister has been crystal clear on the international scene. He has made statements definitively with respect to Sri Lanka and our desire to see that country reconcile the very appalling human rights record we have seen over the last number of years.

That is a situation the Prime Minister will address at the Commonwealth. That is a situation on which the Prime Minister has already very firmly advanced a position.

* * *

[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is twice now that the Minister of National Defence has not answered my questions directly. I will give him a third chance.

With respect to the selection of the Auditor General, yesterday, his colleague said that they had chosen this candidate for the position because he was the most meritorious, despite the fact that the government itself insisted that the candidate should be bilingual.

Is the position of the government that there was no candidate who was both meritorious and bilingual?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, our government's position was very clear. The government looked for bilingual candidates. After an exhaustive process, the most meritorious candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson is

an extraordinary person. He wants to learn French and has already started taking lessons.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the government was embarking on an almost half a billion dollar offer on a new satellite system. The program is already delayed and wildly over budget in the U.S.

Could the minister confirm that he is going ahead with the Canadian version of this program anyway, and in terms of transparency and accountability, why is this the first that Canadians are hearing about it?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our efforts in Afghanistan and Libya have proven that the ability to exchange information between headquarters and deployed elements is critical to the success of modern military operations. This government intends to meet this requirement while ensuring the best value for taxpayer money. As such, we have sought an agreement with our allies that provides the Canadian Forces with access to an international constellation of satellites.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister will appreciate that Canadians are nervous about the government getting us into yet another big, expensive, sole-sourced boondoggle: the Chinooks, the F-35s, the Cyclones.

We have been here before and it has cost taxpayers billions of dollars, and this sure looks like another boondoggle in the making.

What will the minister do differently this time to make sure that it does not happen again?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, space continues to be an important part of the global security environment. The Canadian Forces space-related activities are an essential component of a robust defence for Canada and North America, wherein are the F-35s and the other assets that we are providing for our men and women in uniform to do their work, and also to maintain Canada's sovereignty.

● (1430)

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, over the past week the Minister of National Defence has refused to say whether any bases will be closed as a result of Conservative cuts. He even claimed the whole story was made up by the opposition, despite the fact there is a directive from his department saying this is so.

My riding is home to CFB Esquimalt, and people want to know, how far will these cuts go? Will the minister stand in the House today and assure the sailors and families at CFB Esquimalt that support for our Pacific fleet will not be cut?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I agree with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca that CFB Esquimalt is a very important base for the Canadian Forces, for the Royal Canadian Navy.

Oral Questions

With respect to his question, he would know that this memorandum, this directive, he is referring to makes no reference whatsoever to base closures.

I repeat to him, as I said to his friend from Hamilton, the only people talking about closure of bases are members of the NDP and one Liberal senator.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 2008 Corporal Stuart Langridge was found dead in his barracks. He had suffered from depression and post-traumatic stress disorder.

After three flawed investigations, the Langridge family is now facing huge legal bills as high as \$200,000 in their attempt to find out why DND failed their son.

Will the Minister of National Defence comply with the recommendation of the chair of the Military Police Complaints Commission, do the right thing, and help this family with their legal bills?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, certainly, our sympathies go out to the Fynes family and the death of Corporal Langridge was indeed a tragedy.

With respect to the Military Police Complaints Commission that is looking into this matter, it has announced that it will hold a public interest hearing into the investigation related to the death of Corporal Langridge.

I think the hon. member would agree it would be inappropriate to comment on a process that is now in place with regard to the recommendation that the Fynes family be funded for their representation on the public interest hearing. Again, it would be inappropriate to comment at this time.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Commonwealth is at the crossroads with respect to human rights. The next meeting is scheduled to take place in Sri Lanka, where the United Nations has confirmed that there are credible allegations of atrocities committed during and after the war. The Commonwealth must not condone this.

Will the Conservatives show leadership and ensure that the next Commonwealth meeting does not take place in Sri Lanka unless it accepts an independent UN investigation of alleged war crimes?

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has spoken out very loudly and clearly on this important issue of human rights. He has certainly relayed the Government of Canada's position to both the high commissioner and directly to the minister of foreign affairs of Sri Lanka, as well as his counterpart in Sri Lanka.

Canada will continue to speak loudly and clearly on behalf of human rights around the world, and especially Sri Lanka.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, at the Commonwealth meeting in Australia, the Canadian government must take a firm stance against impunity. However, a

unilateral boycott of the next meeting in Sri Lanka is far from enough. Instead of isolating itself, Canada must be a leader within the Commonwealth.

What initiatives will this government take to ensure that other countries agree to hold the meeting elsewhere, unless Sri Lanka agrees to an independent investigation of alleged war crimes?

[*English*]

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada's position is very clear. The Prime Minister has stated it, and he has stated it very clearly in Perth, Australia at the Commonwealth Conference.

He has said he would like to see Sri Lanka move forward to address the allegations of human rights abuses. If there is no credible movement toward addressing that issue, he will then rethink about his attendance at the next Commonwealth Conference in Sri Lanka.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has taken any opportunity he can to criticize Europe for its inaction on the economy. The truth is Europe is acting.

However, despite the fact that the Governor of the Bank of Canada says our economy “is slowing to a crawl”, this out of touch Conservative government refuses to act now and create jobs in Canada. Canadians are tired of the government's continued inaction.

We believe in action on this side of the House. We put forward a plan. When will the government finally implement our plan to create jobs and kickstart the Canadian economy?

• (1435)

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is quite an action plan, standing and voting against anything that the government puts forward that actually will help create jobs. Canadians should be very fearful if that is the action plan from the NDP.

We have continued with a plan, a jobs and growth plan from the government. It is working. In fact, so are nearly 650,000 more Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said that everything is going well, but the Governor of the Bank of Canada, Mark Carney, who has a bit more credibility, said this week that the Canadian economy was weakening considerably. The government is not taking action to stimulate job creation. In the meantime, other countries are taking action. It takes hard work. Canadian families have seen enough inaction from this government. It is as simple as that.

*Oral Questions***VETERANS AFFAIRS**

Hon. Sean Casey (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is not to the minister but to the chair of the veterans affairs committee.

Public hearings about the cuts at the Veterans Affairs Department were terminated today, cancelled without hearing from one veteran, the ombudsman, and not even the Royal Canadian Legion.

Veterans fought and paid the ultimate sacrifice for the right and freedom to be heard, and to be heard in public. Secret meetings to avoid accountability are anti-democratic and a slap in the face to veterans.

Why the secrecy?

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know a chair must be fair and neutral, but the bizarre behaviour of this member forces me to answer with what he has been trying to do in the last number of days.

Our committee has been looking very carefully at the accusations he made about great cutbacks and loss of opportunity for veterans. That was proven by the witnesses to be absolutely wrong. Our government has made major commitments to veterans and will continue to do so because it is so important.

The fact that the member continues to disrupt the committee is something he has to look within himself for. The committee membership—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

* * *

TAXATION

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government is taking boutique tax credits to a whole new level.

Millions of lower income Canadians want their children to play hockey or take piano lessons, or would like to volunteer as firefighters. Under this government, millions of lower income Canadians, who do not earn enough to pay taxes, will not get the tax credit.

Why is the government leaving lower income families out in the cold with their noses pressed to the window looking in?

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure why that hon. member would ask for more tax credits for Canadians because every time we put that forward the Liberals vote against it, including, as we just saw, the firefighters. They actually voted against a tax credit for volunteer firefighters.

The other thing they voted against, that I still cannot quite understand, is an increase in the guaranteed income supplement for seniors, the largest increase in GIS that we have seen in 25 years. They voted against it.

• (1440)

[*Translation*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government claims to defend—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, the government claims to defend victims and taxpayers. We have heard it all before. However, it is clear that it is turning its back on victims by eliminating the firearms registry.

Victims themselves are saying this, and they have the support of the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime. But the government does not care about taxpayers either, including Quebecers who paid their fair share for collecting the data contained in the registry, data requested by Quebec's National Assembly.

Why is there so much contempt for the rights of taxpayers in Quebec and elsewhere in Canada?

Oral Questions

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we made a very clear, very specific campaign commitment to destroy the registry. The registry is made up of data and information. We will be destroying the information because the information is the registry. We will fulfill our campaign promise and will continue to fight crime so that our streets are safer for Canadians. I invite the NDP to join us and vote in favour of these bills.

* * *

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has audited all federal government operations in English and French. Would our previous Auditor General have been able to uncover the Liberals' sponsorship scandal if she were not bilingual, a scandal that rocked Canadian politics?

The government's own rules are clear: the AG must be bilingual. Why did the government propose a unilingual candidate? Why is the government breaking its own rules?

[Translation]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague already mentioned, the government sought bilingual candidates. Upon completion of a rigorous process, the most qualified candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson wants to learn French and is already taking courses.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, he spent four years in New Brunswick and never learned French. The government has chosen a unilingual person to serve as auditor general and has the nerve to say that the decision was based on merit.

The position description in the *Canada Gazette* clearly stated, and I quote: "Proficiency in both official languages is essential." The criteria are clear.

Why is the government ignoring the criteria established for an officer of Parliament? Why this slap in the face for francophones? What will the government—

[English]

The Speaker: Order. There was far too much noise from other hon. colleagues during that question.

The hon. President of the Treasury Board has the floor.

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from the interim New Brunswick Liberal leader, Victor Boudreau:

—what Mike Ferguson will face in Ottawa as opposed to Fredericton will be simply a few extra zeroes at the end of the numbers. The same skills and the same types of experience will count in both jobs. And Mike certainly knows all about bureaucracy and government financial systems.

We agree with that comment too.

[Translation]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the National Assembly of Quebec unanimously condemned the appointment of a unilingual auditor general. The disrespect shown to francophones in Quebec and throughout Canada is even greater because this government's own requirement was that candidates be bilingual. Quebecers and Canadians are wondering how a unilingual candidate could have been appointed given that bilingualism was one of the prerequisites.

What were the real criteria used to choose the new auditor general?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we said, Mr. Ferguson will learn French and he was the most qualified candidate.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the idea that in this country there is not one bilingual anglophone or one bilingual francophone capable of doing the job is an insult.

The Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne is also outraged by the appointment of an auditor general who does not speak French. This decision was made barely one week after a unilingual judge was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada. The message that this government is sending to francophones in this country is clear: they are not part of the equation.

Are we to understand that the government is giving up on Canada's linguistic duality?

•(1445)

[English]

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): That is completely untrue, Mr. Speaker. This government in the previous Parliament led the way with a brand new initiative for linguistic duality in this country. We are very proud of that report. We are proud to have initiated that and to implement that report.

Mr. Ferguson is the most qualified candidate, and we have said that he is already learning French. He will do an excellent job. We encourage members on the opposite side to support him as well.

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DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Kyle Seeback (Brampton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians living in our fastest growing provinces and cities have become significantly under-represented due to population growth and an out-of-date seat allocation formula.

Under the current rules, a majority of Canadians will not only remain but become increasingly under-represented. This representation gap must be addressed.

Could the Minister of State for Democratic Reform update the House on the steps our government is taking to provide fair representation to Canadians?

*Oral Questions**[Translation]***MUSEUMS**

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, today, I introduced Bill C-20, the fair representation act. The bill would deliver a principled and reasonable update to our seat allocation formula, providing fair representation for Canadians living in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. It delivers on our commitment to maintain the seat counts of smaller provinces and ensure that Quebec is proportionately represented.

Canadians rightly expect fair and principled representation in their democratic institutions. The fair representation act would deliver on this expectation.

I strongly encourage the opposition to work with us in passing this principled and reasonable legislation.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Edmontonians are stunned and angered at the government's sudden 11th hour backtracking from the new Royal Alberta Museum.

With no explanation, the government again pulled the rug out from under Alberta's capital city to the tune of \$92 million. The project is shovel ready. Millions have already been spent by the province and city.

Would the Conservatives explain why they left Edmonton out in the cold again?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that no funding has been withdrawn from this project by the federal government. We committed \$30 million to this project. It was announced the day the project was announced. We are still committed to that funding. We have not withdrawn any funding from this project.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the \$30 million was promised by the previous government.

The Minister of Public Works expressed concern that a provincial Alberta minister went public on her decision to withdraw support for this important project. She called him a rookie.

The Conservative government committed money to Alberta under the building Canada fund.

Do any other Edmonton MPs share my concern? Will any of them stand up for Edmonton and demand this funding be restored?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the funding that the member is speaking of was never allocated. Our commitment was for \$30 million and it stands. We are not withdrawing those funds from the project. We cannot withdraw funds that we have never given.

I will explain for the member that out of the \$30 million, the Government of Alberta has only accessed \$10 million. So there are still \$20 million there for it to access immediately should it be needed for the project today.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government brags about its efforts to acknowledge the War of 1812, but in the meantime, our museums and our history are in jeopardy. The Canadian Museum of Civilization had to lay off a number of its historical interpreters as well as support staff because of the government's cuts.

When will this government realize that our museums are integral to culture?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us look at the facts. In the global economic crisis, which began in 2008, Canada—our government—was the only government in the G8 to make one key decision: it did not cut, or maintain, but increased its investment in culture. That is our heritage. We have made investments and will continue to make the targeted and significant investments our culture needs.

● (1450)

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, maintaining services with fewer resources is another fine contradiction of this government. Our museums are the lastest victims of these major cuts. They are the guardians of our collective history, in addition to being a significant driver for the tourism industry and our economy in general. The Conservatives are in the process of putting our cultural reputation at risk.

When will this government stop making cuts to arts and culture?

[English]

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in both questions, my hon. colleague mentioned the issue of museums. Our government is the first government in Canadian history to create a national museum outside of the national capital at Pier 21 in Halifax. We also created the Canadian Museum for Human Rights. We passed the legislation. We provided the funding for it. The Liberals talked about it, but we delivered.

When it comes to museums, we have offered more support for small museums than ever before. We are the government that is delivering for culture in a fiscally responsible way that serves the interests of both culture and everyday taxpayers.

They promised the Canadian Museum of Human Rights, we delivered it. All talk, we acted.

*Oral Questions***CANADIAN AIR AND SPACE MUSEUM**

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last September, a crown corporation evicted the Canadian Air and Space Museum. While the volunteer-run museum showed its good faith and developed a viable plan to meet its financial obligations, the reason stated for eviction was for non-payment of rent. However, other tenants who were evicted at the same time were told that they had to go so that Downsview Park could implement its vision.

Would the Minister of Public Works and Government Services tell us what this vision is that will lead to the closure of a museum that has proudly preserved Canada's aviation history?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said in a similar question from a member of the NDP on this very subject, even though it is called the Canadian Air and Space Museum, the fact is that it is a private museum with a private collection. It is not owned by the Government of Canada. By the way, this is an organization that had a fundraising campaign that was not nearly as successful as it had hoped it would be. It has not had the number of visitors it had hoped it would have.

However, I have instructed Mark O'Neill, the president of the Museum of Civilization, to reach out to this museum to talk and work with it about the collection it has and see if there is something we can do to preserve the collection.

The decision made by Downsview is an independent decision that was made in the best interests of taxpayers. I am sorry the Liberals do not agree with that.

Hon. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are huge areas of open space that house this museum. Downsview Park has chosen to destroy these heritage buildings, which once was home to de Havilland Canada, in order to build a hockey rink.

If the government truly cares about heritage and military history, as the minister is indicating, then what is he doing to save, not only the artifacts, but also these historic buildings that are important to the people of Toronto and to all Canadians?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly recognize the importance of the collection, which is why I have taken the action I have described in the first question. I do not doubt my hon. colleague's sincerity. What I do disagree with though is the this or that proposal.

We can have strong, fantastic, brilliant national museums that protect our heritage, and we are doing that. At the same time, however, Downsview Park has a responsibility to do what is in the best interests of taxpayers, and that is what it is doing.

The idea that we cannot have a sports complex, new rinks or support sports and, at the same time, protect the collection of this museum, I think we can do both. I think we will do both and we will do so responsibly for taxpayers.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Muskoka minister said that if he were caught setting up a parallel

process that kept the Auditor General in the dark that he would turn himself over to the cops.

Local mayors were told that all projects would be vetted by civil servants but he broke that promise and set up a parallel process run by the three amigos: the mayor, the hotel manager and the minister. He then hid the documents in the office, which meant that the Auditor General was left in the dark.

When will he do the right thing and check himself into the old crowbar hotel?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the facts have not changed. As a great Canadian once said, "the facts have not changed". They have not changed since yesterday and they will not change tomorrow. The minister of infrastructure made the decision. The Auditor General has thoroughly reviewed it. We know where every dollar went.

Now, while the facts have not changed, that member's position has changed. He has broken his promise. By standing up and talking about broken promises today, he now appoints himself the House's high priest of hypocrisy. Why does he not stand in his place and apologize for breaking his word to his constituents?

• (1455)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am hurt because I think we all know what we are really dealing with here, which is the wasteful, inefficient and ineffective President of the Treasury Board.

After 140 days of dodging the facts, the facts have indeed not changed because the infrastructure minister did not choose the projects. He rubber-stamped the list that was handed to him by the Muskoka maverick. The reason he cannot get up now is that if he stands up he is busted for explaining why his fingerprints are all over the file.

Will he stop hiding behind the back bench, get up and be accountable to Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the former minister of infrastructure has been clear. He approved all of the projects, 32 of them. We know what they are. If the hon. member would like to go to the website for Infrastructure Canada, he could review those projects himself. Every dollar is now accounted for. The projects came in either on or under budget.

That cannot be said about the \$2 billion Liberal long gun registry, against which that member fought for years in his effort to be re-elected in his riding.

Oral Questions

Will he now be consistent with the position that he has always taken and announce that he will vote for scrapping the long gun registry?

STATUS OF WOMEN

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in many parts of the world, the rights, the safety and even the lives of girls and women are threatened by violence that has its source in perverse and distorted notions of honour.

Regrettably, Canada has not been immune from such abuses.

Therefore, I ask the Minister for Status of Women to advise the House as to what the government is doing in response to this domestic threat.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, honour-motivated crimes are nothing more than cruel acts of violence. Over a year ago, I called on community and religious leaders to outright condemn these acts of violence.

I also asked women and girls who experienced this violence and intimidation to please speak out. We have held round tables, we have done outreach, and it has resulted in the funding of a project by the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, called the "Elimination of Harmful Cultural Practices". This initiative will empower girls and women and engage community organizations, the legal community and law enforcement to better respond to the issues of abusive cultural practices.

Our government continues to ask girls who are intimidated by this kind of violence to please speak out.

INFRASTRUCTURE FUNDING

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it appears that the Prime Minister is once again giving the people of Edmonton the back of his hand.

First, there was the broken promise on the portrait gallery, then the Conservatives denied funding for the Edmonton folk music festival and then they failed to back Edmonton's bid to host the World Expo.

The Conservatives have no trouble finding 50 million bucks to build gazebos in Muskoka, but when it comes to funding Edmonton's Royal Alberta Museum, it appears they are weaseling out of their previous commitment.

Why does the government continue to show such disrespect for the capital of the province of Alberta?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I should just correct the record. Our government has been proud to support the Edmonton folk music festival with funding. Again, I reiterate that our government has not withdrawn any funding from this project.

We committed \$30 million to the Royal Alberta Museum. We are very proud to do that. That funding commitment stands and we have not withdrawn that funding.

[Translation]

BROADCASTING AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the transition to digital signals remains problematic for thousands of Canadians, including many people in my riding of Rivière-du-Nord. Thousands of households, many of them among the poorest, are getting fewer channels than before, even with a digital converter paid for out of their own pockets. In some regions of the country, Canadians cannot even get the CBC, even though it is our public broadcaster.

Do Canadians now have to pay to watch the CBC? Is this the government's logic: no money, no *National*? What does the government plan to do to correct the situation?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the transition is being done independently by the CRTC, as my colleague must know. The CRTC worked with our government and with the CBC to ensure that taxpayers who pay out of their own pockets could continue receiving CBC programming. The process will continue next year. It is ongoing. We are aware of the concerns expressed by the member, but this process is definitely an improvement.

[English]

INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

Mr. Lee Richardson (Calgary Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a long history as a country whose extractive industries have contributed to Canada's prosperity and economic growth.

We know that many developing countries are rich in natural resources but do not have the capacity to manage these resources to benefit their people and help lift them out of poverty.

In the last Parliament, the Liberals introduced an ill-conceived corporate social responsibility bill that would have punished the mining sector.

What is our government doing to help these countries ensure their natural resources ultimately contribute to economic growth and benefit their local population, including those living in poverty?

● (1500)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada can help developing countries rich in resources to also realize strong economic growth to benefit their people.

This morning, our Prime Minister made a significant announcement: the creation of the Canadian international institute for the extractive industries and development. The institute would help developing countries harness and manage their resources to generate a strong, sustainable economy and, thereby, reduce poverty.

This builds on our government's commitment to make a real difference in the lives of the poor—

Business of the House

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl. [Translation]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans made a recommendation for the government to create a task force to look into the management of the snow crab fishery in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. We know that the Conservatives are not the best at taking advice. If they were they would be examining the management of the fishery as a whole. That is fair enough. Perhaps we could look at one fishery problem at a time.

Will the Conservatives listen to the committee and create a task force to look into the management of the snow crab fishery?

Hon. Keith Ashfield (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member should know, this was a record year for Atlantic snow crab prices. I congratulate the fleets on a successful season. The long-term economic prosperity of the snow crab industry is my priority and the priority of my department. We are committed to ensuring that snow crab stocks are managed sustainably and we will work in close collaboration with the industry.

[Translation]

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. Louis Plamondon (Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives are ignoring Quebec's requests by introducing a bill that will diminish the political weight of the Quebec nation in the House of Commons.

By so doing, they are deliberately ignoring the unanimous resolution of the National Assembly that, as a nation, Quebec must be able to enjoy special protection for its political weight.

Does the Prime Minister understand that if he goes ahead with this bill, which has been unanimously rejected in Quebec, he will prove that his government's recognition of the Quebec nation was simply a ruse to hide his indifference toward Quebec?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We have resolved some very important issues with the Quebec nation, for example, the Old Harry deposit and the harmonization of the GST and the QST.

That being said, our position on representation in the House of Commons has been clear for a long time. We made a clear commitment and we are going to keep it. Under our fair, reasonable and principle-based bill, Quebec's representation will correspond to its population. This bill will move every Canadian province toward representation by population.

[English]

The Speaker: I understand the member for Windsor—Tecumseh has the usual Thursday question.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to ask the Thursday question. However, I am less pleased to see the government once again showing its undemocratic tendency by using the Standing Orders to restrict debate here in the House.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, the rules are here to guide all of us. They have to be used judiciously and that is not what is happening.

This will be the fifth time in 38 sitting days that a time allocation motion has been imposed. That is coming close to setting the same record that the Liberals set, which was heavily criticized by the current Prime Minister when he was sitting on this side of the House. The Conservatives are well ahead of the record that was set by the Liberals back in 2002. They will match it over the next few weeks at the rate they are going.

Perhaps the government House leader could tell the House exactly what formula he is using to determine what is enough debate, because we heard that from him and the Minister of Public Safety yesterday and again this morning.

We have had extreme limitations imposed on the ability to start the debate on this side of the House before it is cut off by a time allocation motion from the government. I could go through those but I will not use up the time today.

We did not even have the opportunity to commence debate on the bill that is before the House today. Before our justice and public safety critic could stand on his feet the government moved a time allocation motion. That is the kind of abuse we are seeing. We have not had a lot of debate on the bill, which has new provisions with regard to destroying records. We had two hours of debate on the long gun registry in the last Parliament, but it was a different bill because those provisions were not in it.

I ask the government House leader, how soon will he be moving a motion for time allocation on Bill C-20, which was tabled today? How much time will we be given? We on this side of the House want to know what the government considers a reasonable amount of time for debate. Perhaps I should put it this way: how little debate does the government think is reasonable before it slams the door shut and does not allow us meaningful democratic debate in this country?

Government Orders

● (1505)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the issues we have been discussing in the House of Commons through this fall, for which we have brought in time allocation motions to clarify how long the debate will last, are issues that have been discussed at length over the past five or six years. They are issues that have been debated at length in elections. They are issues we have made commitments to Canadians on in the last election. Canadians responded to those commitments by giving us a majority and asking us to deliver on those commitments. Those issues have been debated in the public forum, the most extensive and important forum possible, where Canadians pass judgment and ask us to deliver on our commitments. The government is doing what it said it would do and will continue to do that.

My approach with regard to time allocation is to move a motion as early as possible so that everyone is clear how much time will be available for debate. It is not to bring a motion at the very last hour to suddenly end debate. Rather, it is to allow people to plan for the debate.

When people at home are listening they think that the concept of four days of debate is a lot of time, as in the case we are dealing with. In their workplace most people do not debate an issue for four days before they decide what to do. They debate it and they make a decision. In this case, there is enough time to make a very clear decision on an important question.

With regard to our agenda, next week will be democratic reform week in the House. We will focus on measures aimed at integrity and accountability, which the Conservatives committed to during the last election. The cornerstone bill will be the fair representation act, which was introduced earlier today. This important bill fulfills our government's long-standing commitment to move closer to representation by population in the House of Commons. It is a principle as old as the country, and at the core of the original drafting of our country's founding documents by Sir John A. Macdonald.

[Translation]

With that in mind, I have scheduled debate for this bill to begin next Wednesday and to continue on Thursday, after the opposition caucuses have had a chance to consider the bill. I trust that all parties will see that this is a good bill, and that they will support it. I look forward to this debate.

I am also looking forward to the introduction of other legislation on democratic reform next week, and perhaps some other measures. I hope that there will even be time to continue debate on the Senate reform bill at some point next week.

[English]

Before we get to Wednesday, we will continue to debate the ending the long gun registry bill this afternoon and tomorrow. The fourth day of debate will occur on Tuesday.

Key to integrity and accountability is the principle that a government should keep its commitments by repealing the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We are doing what we said we would do. We are keeping our commitments to Canadians.

[Translation]

Finally, next Monday will be the fourth allotted day.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, the government House leader did not answer my question as to when he will move a motion for time allocation.

Can I conclude from what the government House leader said that we will only get one day of debate on the seat redistribution bill? That sounds like that is what he will do, move to the reform of the Senate bill after one day of debate on the seat redistribution bill. I would ask him to confirm that.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to confirm that is not the case. I apologize if I was not clear. I said in French that we will be debating the seat redistribution bill on Wednesday and we have also planned to debate it on Thursday of next week.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1510)

[English]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh has 11 minutes left.

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I was in the midst of my address to the House before we broke for question period, I was discussing the costs of the ongoing operation of the gun registry and saying that after all the years I have spent on this file and all of the information we have received, I was quite prepared to rely on the credibility of the RCMP and the figure its officials gave us, which was \$4 million for the ongoing cost of the operation of the long gun registry. The handgun registry, the prohibited weapons registry and the licensing are of course additional costs above and beyond that, but that was the figure the RCMP gave us, and I accepted that figure.

While I am talking about the RCMP, I want to raise another issue: the effectiveness of the long gun registry. Quite frankly, I was disturbed today when I was listening to members from the government side claiming that it was totally ineffective, in particular the member who said that he was a former RCMP officer and that he believed the same thing.

That brought back to my mind the use of the long gun registry in the Mayerthorpe incident, an incident that stands as a historical tragedy in this country. We had not lost four RCMP officers in one event at any time in our history. While conducting military operations in the 1800s, the RCMP lost more officers in one battle, but this was the first time in the history of the country in over 140 years that we had four RCMP officers murdered in one event.

Government Orders

The perpetrator of that crime killed himself in the same incident, but we knew that he could not have committed the crime without assistance from at least one other person and perhaps more. It took the better part of a year and a half before officers were able to identify those two other men who had assisted him. They broke that case. The investigation was finally successful because they were able to use the long gun registry and were able to identify the owners of one of the guns used in those murders.

There is no recognition on the part of the government and the Conservative members of that fact. That is one example of our police forces across the country using the long gun registry in an investigation to identify culprits, bring them to trial, and ultimately achieve convictions and sentences.

Conservatives refuse to acknowledge that, and that is a scandal if one believes, as I do, in the important role that the RCMP has played historically in our country and the crucial role that our police officers play in protecting us.

That is what this registry is about. It is about protecting our police officers. It is about protecting our society as a whole. Is it perfect? Believe me, I know the failures of the system, but it is a tool that can be used and is used repeatedly by our police officers.

Conservatives stand in the House on a regular basis and accuse members of the opposition of making up facts and creating an atmosphere that is totally away from reality, but the reality is that the vast majority of police officers in this country support the use of the gun registry once they are trained in using it.

In the last round, when we were fighting the private member's bill on the same topic, out of hundreds of police chiefs, only three could be identified by the Conservative Party and their cohorts as being opposed to the registry. All the other police chiefs in this country were in favour of keeping it, because they knew—not believed, but knew—that it protected their officers.

•(1515)

Is it perfect? No, it is not perfect. Would it prevent every single police officer from facing a gun attack? No, it would not; it would be absolutely naive to think so. However, that is the standard that the Conservatives have set: if it does not work every single time, then we should get rid of it.

If it saves 10% of the lives of police officers, it is worth keeping. If it saves one life, is it not worth keeping? Is \$4 million a year not worth spending, if we save one police officer's life? It is my absolute belief that it saves a lot more lives than that.

When the Conservatives stand up in the House and when they go across the country to talk to people, they never talk about Mayerthorpe—never. They refuse to talk about police chiefs, other than every so often, as we saw with some of the proponents of the private members' bills, denigrating our police chiefs and accusing them of conflict of interest. Such accusations are imaginary at best and perhaps paranoid at worst. They are grossly unfair to the role our police chiefs play in protecting our society and protecting their own officers. Quite frankly, those accusations made against our police chiefs were shameful.

With regard to the cost of dismantling the registry, I want to repeat that the Conservatives do not have any idea of what it would cost to dismantle it.

When we look at the reality, we see that the Province of Quebec has now come forward to say very clearly that it will take it on. If the federal government will not take on the responsibility it has to protect members of society in Quebec, the Province of Quebec has said that it will do it. The Province of Ontario is giving serious consideration to doing the same thing. I believe that in B.C. our party, the NDP, is thinking the same thing. After the next election we hope the NDP will be in government and will take on the responsibility if the bill passes.

If that happens in all three cases in those three provinces, it would represent more than 75% of the population of this country. The governments representing them are saying they want to keep the registry. They know it works. They know it protects their citizens.

I want to touch on facts, not emotion. In the period of time the registry has been in place, these are facts: there was a 30% reduction in domestic violence involving long guns, roughly a 10% to 15% reduction in suicides by long guns, and a more than 10% reduction in the number of accidents from long guns, whose victims were mostly children under the age of 14.

That is why the medical associations have come out so strongly in favour of supporting the registry: it is because they saw that guns owned by people who should never have owned a gun were being taken out of circulation over the years. These people were not the regular hunters or farmers who use them responsibly, but people who did not handle them properly, did not store them properly or did not transport them properly. I suppose only the divine knows why they bought the guns in the first place. When we heard of the accident, the suicide or the violent crime, very many of those times it involved a gun that had not been properly stored or taken care of by someone who should never have owned a gun.

•(1520)

I have great sympathy for the argument the Conservatives make with regard to responsible actions by long gun owners. The vast majority of them are law-abiding citizens, as they say so often. When I talk to them, a majority say that they understand why the registry is here. They say it is because of those other people, the people who did not handle guns properly and put this country in a mess.

At the end of the day, if we are serious about performing our fundamental responsibility as members of Parliament to protect our citizens, this bill should be voted down.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Windsor—Tecumseh for his comments, but I am shocked and dismayed that he would cite Mayerthorpe as an example of the success of the long gun registry. He challenged members on this side of the House to talk about Mayerthorpe, and I am going to talk about it.

Government Orders

Mayerthorpe is an example of the failure of the long gun registry, because four brave Mounties died that day and the long gun registry did nothing to protect them. In testimony to the public safety committee when the private member's bill from the member for Portage—Lisgar was before the committee, police officers admitted to me that because the long gun registry is so inherently inaccurate, they cannot rely on it when they go into a situation, and it is inaccurate because criminals such as Mr. Roszko do not register their guns.

How can the member stand up and cite Mayerthorpe as a success of the long gun registry when four brave Mounties died that day?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, the member is pointing to selective evidence in that committee. When I questioned the people who came before it and gave that kind of evidence—not with regard to Mayerthorpe, which I will come to in a minute, but with regard to its not being effective—repeatedly it was quite clear that they never used the system.

I remember one officer from a community in the west that I will not identify. I was shocked at the police officer's ignorance of the system. He did not have any idea of what the system was like. He had not used it in 10 years. A bunch of training has been done by the RCMP over the last two to three years, and as police officers were trained on how to use the system properly, it was being used much more. Every time the trainers went into a city to do the training, police officers would take the training and the usage of the registry would go up dramatically and effectively.

Coming back to Mayerthorpe, the reality is that we would never have caught those two associates had it not been for the long gun registry. It is true. The investigators were completely stymied until they were able, through the registry, to identify the owner of one of those guns. The two people who were then subsequently accused of aiding and abetting in those murders were primarily convicted because of it. That is the reality.

I have one final point. The police knew Roszko had guns. Had they been enforcing that, the crime might never have happened.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the hearings were being held, I made it a point to get to as many as I could in order to take in the information first-hand. It escapes me how, through the course of those hearings, anybody could say there was no value in the registry or no point in maintaining it, because witness after witness indicated how it does provide a great deal of pertinent information in many cases.

The Conservatives continue to hide behind statements like "This won't solve gangland killings". It was never purported to solve that kind of crime, but there are so many other areas. Given the domestic violence and suicides in this country, I am at a loss as to why the Conservatives want to take this useful bank of reference information and cast it aside. I know my colleague sat in on many of those discussions. Would he share that same opinion? I am just at a loss as to why they would want to flush this information that has been compiled.

•(1525)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the east coast is absolutely right. There is no logical, reasonable explanation whatsoever as to why we would get rid of all this data.

From a purely partisan standpoint, I understand their fear, because they know very well that after the next federal election, the likelihood is that they are not going to be on that side of the House and we are. If the database still existed at that point, it would be a lot easier to reinstate it, so that as a government, the NDP could provide a sense of security and guarantee, as much as it could, that it would do the utmost to protect our citizens from violent crimes. The only rational reason they would want to get rid of it would be that they are afraid of the outcome of the next federal election.

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I stand today, as a former member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, to remind the member that the Conservative Party has 11 members who were former members of police forces across the country, many of whom attended the funeral in Mayerthorpe in full uniform.

Could the member please tell us, because he did not answer the question the last time it was asked, how the registry would have prevented that occurrence in Mayerthorpe? We would point out that that incident started from a grow operation. I do not understand why the NDP is voting against important crime legislation that would reduce grow operations in this country and deal with harsher crimes, such as sexual assault and a host of other crimes that Mr. Roscoe committed before that event occurred. That is a true crime prevention strategy. I would like the member to please answer how the registry would prevent that occurrence.

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, it is a question of enforcement of the registry. The police forces in that area knew that Roszko had weapons and that he was not supposed to have weapons. One of the weapons that was found and used to ultimately convict the two members who aided and abetted him had a registered weapon. They found it at the site and were ultimately able to track him. That was on the investigative side.

The reality is that had they charged Roszko for breaching the long gun registry, they could have convicted him of that because they had very clear evidence that he had weapons. That may very well have prevented the incident from ever happening.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question to ask the hon. member since I have just received a message from someone who is watching us live. He is asking if the government's contradictions can be publicized. He is saying that the government is spending billions of dollars on the army, war efforts and border closures. He says that the government wants to lock up offenders and spend money on prisons but it will not allow us, the people who have invested over a billion dollars in setting up the firearms registry, to take that data and manage it ourselves in Quebec.

What does the hon. member think about that?

Government Orders

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Speaker, what the government is doing is clearly inexcusable. It is not just all the money that it is spending on the military but also what it is doing with our prisons. Putting people in prison is not going to help us prevent crime. The Conservatives—it is not us—are prepared to spend billions of dollars on prisons but that does not really do anything to protect people and society.

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform you that I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the member for Yukon.

I, like many of my colleagues before me, am very pleased to rise in this House this afternoon to support Bill C-19, a bill to abolish, to completely do away with the long gun registry, just as we promised in the election campaign. This is very important to me because I am a politician who keeps his word, and I am glad that my government is also keeping its word.

As you are aware, this registry is useless and costly. The reason so many Conservative members are so adamant about dismantling the registry is because they have listened to years of consultations with our constituents about the registry. A number of my colleagues, including the member for Yorkton—Melville, have held countless meetings throughout the country. They have listened to Canadians tell them what they think about the registry. We have heard from honest firearm owners, including hunters, farmers and sport shooters, and we have also heard from people who believe that the way to fight crime is to have tougher laws.

We have also listened to the victims of tragedies such as the ones at the École Polytechnique and Dawson College. I would like the victims and their families to know that we share the same goal, the same objective in the fight against crime, and that is to ensure that these heinous crimes do not reoccur.

It is a shame that these crimes were committed with registered firearms. Registering a weapon—and by that I mean hunting weapons, rifles and shotguns—does not help to combat crime. I have a strong conviction that together we can convince our opposition colleagues to support this bill.

I have heard many of my colleagues talk about the cost. Yes, it was disastrous. The cost of setting up this registry in the late 1980s and early 1990s was astronomical. Why was it astronomical? You will recall that it was the first Liberal scandal. Some say that the registry cost over \$1 billion, others that it cost up to \$2 billion. Those are the figures the CBC came up with following a number of investigations that were conducted at the time under the Access to Information Act. So we all agree that it was a waste of taxpayers' money. We are still trying to determine where this money went.

Then there was a second Liberal scandal, the sponsorship scandal, mainly in my own province. More billions of dollars were spent, and they were spent to keep a party in power that was corrupt at that time. This was an intolerable waste. I agree with the opposition. At the time, they should have invested that money in crime prevention. How many crimes could have been prevented with rehabilitation programs for criminals, with tougher laws to make sure that criminals are not tempted to commit these crimes?

The truth is simple and clear, and people do not want to hear that truth. There is no proof that the long gun registry helps to prevent

crime. It must be pointed out that the bill covers only the long gun registry. This is one section of the registry, which has four sections. One section relates to handguns, and that will be retained in full; another section relates to prohibited weapons, and that will be retained in full; and a third section relates to licences for individuals. That registry has the name, address and contact information for individuals who want to obtain a firearms possession and acquisition licence.

• (1530)

In this registry we have the names of honest citizens: farmers, hunters, people who use their rifles for sporting purposes. These data are going to stay in the registry. It is important to point that out. What is going to be done is very precise: the registry that relates to long guns is going to be destroyed. The registry is made up of data. The registry is composed of information about those weapons. The data are part of the registry and the data will be destroyed. That is very clear in the bill.

Some people say that statistics show there has been a decline in homicides and suicides in Canada. I agree with the people who talk about those statistics. That is the statistical reality. However, what they are not telling us is that this is nothing new. The decline in homicides and suicides in Canada does not date from the creation of this registry in the mid-1990s. It is a trend that goes back a long time, to 1979 to be precise. There is a perfect declining curve for suicides and homicides. It has been declining since 1979. That is what has to be pointed out. The statistics cannot be interpreted to our own advantage. We have to look at the statistics overall and see what they tell us.

What strikes me most about this registry is how it treats honest citizens as potential criminals, forcing them to register their guns. These people abide by Canadian laws, and this registry was introduced under the Criminal Code. That needs to be said. Firearms need to be registered every year; it is a tax grab. Each year, you have to pay to register your firearm. Yet if ever an honest citizen, an honest farmer or hunter, forgot to register his gun, it would be a criminal offence. He would become a criminal. We do not want to treat these honest people like criminals.

This registry has affected rural areas in Canada and aborigines as well. Their culture and way of life have been changed by the requirement to register their guns. They are simply asked to take a firearms safety course. And they are asked to take a test. Then, the RCMP does a criminal background check and, if necessary, a background check for violent offences. The RCMP does detailed checks on people who apply for a gun permit. That will stay; it will always be there. The RCMP will continue to investigate these people. And people will agree to those investigations because they know that they are honest and have done nothing wrong. They are prepared to do that. The RCMP does it because they want to protect the public and ensure that a person who has the right to a permit has been investigated.

Government Orders

It should also be said that this permit is good for five years. If something happens during that time, the permit can be taken away. That needs to be said. These measures are in place to protect society and prevent crime. We are taking other measures in this Parliament, such as Bill C-10 to implement tougher sentences. And I think that is the direction we need to be moving in. We drafted a bill that ensures that a Canadian who commits a gun-related crime will be given a minimum sentence. It is important for Canadians to know that.

I am extremely disappointed to hear that kind of demagogic concerning the registry. Some people are suggesting that we want to destroy all of the information in the registry, which is completely false, because the registry has four sections, as I said earlier. We want to destroy only the section that has to do with the registration of long guns, because that information is not in line with this government's priorities.

• (1535)

Any government policy must always be examined based on its effects, not its intentions, and in this case, the registry has had no effect on crime prevention.

• (1540)

[English]

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, police forces across the country are saying that they need this registry. It strikes me as very odd that a law and order party would do something that is clearly not requested by the police forces.

When in the future, after the long gun registry has been scrapped, a police officer enters a situation, in which he would have known there were long guns, and is subsequently killed, what will the government say to the family of that slain police officer?

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, I am glad someone asked that question. We are told that police officers consult the registry several times a day, which is true. When a Canadian is stopped for speeding or something like that and the police officer enters the licence plate number into the system, the computer links automatically to the registry. That is why it is used so often. In their daily activities, when police officers are looking for information on someone's licence, the registry automatically opens. Yes, this information is very useful to police officers. What is important for police officers to know is whether an individual has a possession and acquisition licence. As I said earlier, police officers responding to an emergency call will still have access to that information, namely, whether a Canadian has a possession and acquisition licence. If that is the case, the police officer can take the necessary precautions when responding.

[English]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question that has been bothering me because, quite frankly, it is quite a conundrum. I just cannot quite wrap my head around it.

The New Democratic Party was all over the map on the gun registry prior to our forming government. A large group of its members, who represent rural ridings, voted in favour of the gun

registry. Then when the votes really mattered, when we had an opportunity when we first formed government, NDP members turned their backs on that previous vote and voted against the gun registry.

Now that we have a majority government, their votes still matter in the House, but they will not matter when they are tallied up on this bill. I wonder how many New Democratic members will now change their mind again and vote against the gun registry.

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, I have the same question.

We are here to listen to the public and make decisions in order to protect the public, and that is what we are doing. It concerns me a bit to see the opposition parties, the NDP and the Liberals, take an ideological position. Why is it an ideological position? It is simple. They are not looking at the facts. This registry has not prevented heinous crimes from being committed in my own province.

They are taking an ideological position and misinforming the public when they say that registering a shotgun will reduce crime. Canadians have common sense and they know that registering a gun does not reduce crime. The members opposite are taking an ideological position and misinforming the public. I am a little disappointed to see that the NDP is unable to face the facts.

[English]

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I, too, have a question that is troubling me, a conundrum as the hon. member across termed it.

Accepting that the federal government does not want a long gun registry, what I fail to understand is why the government will not respect the wishes of democratically elected governments at different levels, such as at the provincial level, that act on the advice of the police and respect the decisions of the voters of that jurisdiction?

Why will the government not provide the data that already exists to those jurisdictions?

• (1545)

[Translation]

Hon. Maxime Bernier: Mr. Speaker, the answer is simple: the data and the section of the registry on long guns do not reduce crime in Canada. That is the first reason.

The second reason is that the data are inaccurate. We cannot deny it. In 2002, the Auditor General said that the data were inaccurate. They are inaccurate because at the time, hunters said they were frustrated at being treated like potential criminals and having to register their firearms in addition to having their possession and acquisition licence. They agree with taking the necessary tests to get their licence and they comply with that. They understand the reasoning behind such a measure. However, a number of them have not gone so far as to register their firearm. This registry is inaccurate and is not a suitable tool to give to the provinces.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to tell Yukon citizens, trappers, hunters, athletes, sport shooters, collectors and first nations who rely on long guns to protect their heritage, culture and traditional way of life that the bill has, as promised by our government, been introduced into the House.

Long guns have been a staple tool in Yukon since its beginning, before it was designated as its own territory. It is indeed true of Canada itself. We have a long and proud history founded on a trapping culture, a fur-trading culture, a first nation and aboriginal culture and on a farming culture in which the long gun has played a vital role in basic survival.

Today, in many parts of our nation, long guns are essential tools of basic and day-to-day routines of life. They represent tools that allow aboriginal and first nation communities to hunt, harvest and teach. Long guns raise Canadians to the top of podiums in Olympic and international competitions in trap shooting and biathlons. Long guns put food on the tables of Canadians. Fundamentally, the long gun registry has unfairly and without reason targeted the wrong people.

When we talk about the long gun registry we are not talking about criminals, we are not even talking about the sorts of guns that criminals are likely to use. More than \$2 billion has been wasted and it is not coming back no matter how long we continue throwing good money after bad. That is \$2 billion wasted on a program that was supposed to cost about \$2 million, which is a staggering difference.

Our government has invested in prevention programs such as youth gang prevention funds because they are tangible, effective measures to help reduce crime.

The long gun registry placed unnecessary and costly barriers in front of law-abiding Canadians. It generates more paperwork, which is not something that is in generally short supply nowadays. Canadians spoke loud and clear in their objections to this.

I have outlined for my riding that I aim to learn from our past, guard it from neglect, improve the present and perfect our future. Reducing the barriers and red tape will ensure that innocent Canadians are not punished and that they are supported in the activities that define a Canadian lifestyle enjoyed by rural and urban citizens.

I have a couple of examples. I also want to quickly touch on something I heard that was a bit disturbing to me.

As a former member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and belonging to a government party that has 11 former members or retired members of police forces across the country, we have the strongest voice of front-line police services representation in our government today. Therefore, to hear the member for Windsor—Tecumseh bring up the Mayerthorpe incident and then blame the RCMP for not enforcing the act as a direct result of that tragic event is absolutely astounding. I find that shocking and very disturbing.

The member then questioned the value of building prisons. He stood in the House and voted against legislation that would increase sentences and sanctions to make it tougher on criminals who were involved in those kinds of grow-ops, an operation in that case that pre-empted the entire event itself.

To suggest that had the RCMP enforced the long gun law that Mr. Roszko would not have committed that crime is erroneous and insulting to the members of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. If we follow the line of thinking that the NDP positions day in and day out in the House, Mr. Roszko may have been captured with an illegal firearm, but he certainly would not have gone to prison if the NDP had anything to say about it. He would have gone to a daycare, which is not where that gentleman belonged.

I will leave that topic and speak to another experience I have had as a member of the law enforcement community. As a former conservation officer in the Yukon territory, I and my colleagues worked every day in remote and isolated regions of our territory and we did so having hundreds of interactions with law-abiding hunters.

• (1550)

Conservation officers across Canada deal with people carrying firearms every day, numerous times, and have absolutely no access to a registry. This does not put them in any greater danger than the law enforcement community because what they have found, as I have found, is that firearm owners are trained. They are safe, responsible, ethical and socially and environmentally conscience individuals. They are not criminals.

As a father, I have taught my son responsible and safe use of firearms. It provides us an opportunity at different times in our lives during busy schedules, both his and mine, to get out on the land and enjoy quality time. Firearms are not about getting out and killing things. They are about time in the wilderness, time in our great environment and teaching, learning and growing together. I would hate to teach my son that that activity is something we should worry about being criminalized because of the ineffective and irresponsible use of legislation introduced by the Liberal Party.

As the Yukon MP, I committed to taking action and voting to get rid of the registry. I campaigned on this, I was supported on this, and our government is delivering on its commitment. The issue then is a little bigger than the abolishment of the registry itself. It is about restoring the faith of our constituents that we will do as we promised, that we listened to the common person and that we remember who put us here and why they put us here. I have no doubt at all about the mandate I have from the Yukon people in respect to abolishing the long gun registry.

We also look forward to moving along from a 15-year long debate and progressing with more effective programs and government business. By scrapping the registry and the data, we can put this unfortunate part of the Liberal legacy behind us and move forward.

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I am looking forward to seeing the results of the vote. I am very curious to see how the member for Western Arctic casts his vote when he understands the importance of this for the heritage, culture, history and day-to-day life of aboriginal people, first nations communities, the lives and activities of all northerners, the people of the Northwest Territories, Yukon, Nunavut and, indeed, across all rural and even urban regions of our country.

The introduction of the bill represents a promise made and a promise kept. Our government, as did many individual members in the opposition, assured the citizens of our ridings that we would vote in favour of getting rid of this wasteful and ineffective registry.

As Robert Service wrote in *The Cremation of Sam McGee*, “a promise made is a debt unpaid”.

We are making good on this and all other commitments we made in a well led plan for Canada's near future during the May election.

I urge members of all parties to support this legislation and make good on the promises they made to their constituents in their ridings when they were seeking election to the House.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is nice to hear the comments from the member for Yukon, a place where I lived and still have fond regard for.

The government is fond of talking about how it stands up for victims but, frankly, what we need is a government that stands up to prevent victims of crime, to prevent victims of illegal use of long guns. It is fond of saying that people who carry long guns, the farmers and fishermen, do not cause harm, that it is the criminals, and yet we have this record of many people killed by long guns.

The biggest concern the emergency doctors have expressed is the numbers of suicides by long guns. They have been one of the greatest proponents of this registry.

The government also talks about waste and yet it sat on its haunches for six years. When a backbench member tabled a similar law, it never stepped up to the plate, as the government, to table the same law. The government allowed moneys to be expended over six years on a registry that it is now saying was a waste of money.

Could the member address the fact that my police chief, who very strongly supports this registry, is on my side? We want to prevent the victims of crime, not worry about them after the fact.

• (1555)

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, our government is very concerned about the victims of crime. We present that every day in legislation in the House and the opposition continues to vote against those initiatives.

I can say this about having people in our corner. I travelled from community to community while I campaigned and during the summer and I spoke with front-line police officers in my territory. Having been one and having 10 other colleagues in the government caucus who were front-line law enforcement officers and having a police chief in our corner, this is not the reality of constituents and it is not the reality of what is going on, and the needs, wishes and desires of front-line police. I can speak to this issue, as can my law enforcement colleagues in our caucus, because we have talked to front-line police officers. We have been front-line police officers. We

know what they want and what they need and we will deliver on that. They support the bills that get tough on crime. They support our safe streets and communities act.

I would ask that member to support that kind of legislation if she and her party are that concerned about victims of crime.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, common sense needs to be applied to this full discussion.

Whether one is for or against gun registration, most people will look at it from a province of Quebec perspective. It will cost Quebec tens of millions of dollars to recreate the same data bank that the Conservative government is going to delete. Rather than spending money on the re-creation of this data bank, it could be spending that money on community policing, policing initiatives and health care needs. Instead, the government is mandating the provinces to create their own data bank because it will hit the delete button on the information in the registry.

From a common sense perspective, does that make any sense to the member?

Mr. Ryan Leef: Mr. Speaker, just a point of clarification. Our government is not mandating any province to re-create the registry.

From my constituents' perspective, and I think it would be safe to say it would be the same for people across the western part of our country, they would not be in favour of having information, which they have provided to a federal body under federal legislation, turned over to the province of Quebec. If I tried to tell my constituents in Yukon territory that their information would be housed on a data base for the province of Quebec to use at will, that would not fly. That would not fly in any other part of the country. Quebec is more than welcome to start its own registry at its own cost for its own purpose, but that will not work with our constituents.

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three stories to tell you today, but I will warn you, they are not very happy stories.

The first story took place on December 6, 1989, in Montreal. At 4 p.m., a young man, 25-year-old Marc Lépine, arrived at the École Polytechnique, which is part of the Université de Montréal. He walked around the school for about an hour. People saw him all over, in offices and so on. At about 5:10, a little more than an hour later, he went into a mechanical engineering class where there were about 60 people. He then took out a .22 calibre semi-automatic rifle and told the women that because they wanted to become engineers, they were feminists, and he hated feminists. He then told the men to go to one side and the women to the other. People thought it was a joke, so they did not do it. That was when he fired a shot in the air. People started to take him seriously then, so the men lined up on one side and the women on the other. He then told the men to leave the classroom. So the men did. And what happened next was that he fired on the nine women who stayed in the classroom. Six of them died.

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It went on like that for 20 minutes. Twenty minutes can be a very long time in circumstances like that. He continued to walk around the school, shooting at women and men, because the men were helping some of the women. In all, 14 women died, and 10 women and four men were injured—men who were helping the women, of course. Most of these people were in their early twenties. They were university students, and there was also a female university employee.

Marc Lépine killed himself. So that makes 15 deaths. After talking to the journalists outside, Pierre Leclair, who was the public relations director for the Montreal police, went into the building and, sadly, found the body of his own daughter, Maryse Leclair, one of the students who died that day. She had been killed by a firearm, and also stabbed, even though she had begged the murderer not to do it.

Obviously the police investigated, and during the investigation a letter written by the murderer was found. In the letter, the murderer repeated that he hated feminists, and there was even a list of 19 feminist women he said he wanted to kill. They included a journalist, a television personality, a politician and six police officers.

The consequences of Mr. Lépine's act do not stop there. After that event, several students at the École Polytechnique committed suicide, and at least two of them left letters saying it was the anguish caused by the killings at the Polytechnique, the Montreal massacre, that prompted them to kill themselves. So the connection here is obvious. There is no doubt about the connection. That is my first story.

My second story took place on September 13, 2006. It was 12:42 p.m., and another young man, 25-year-old Kimveer Gill, arrived at Dawson College. So again this is in Montreal. He had with him three firearms, one of which was a semi-automatic. He started shooting outside. Then he went into the cafeteria. Remember that it was 12:42, which is lunchtime, so there were a lot of people in the cafeteria. Twenty-eight minutes later, a young woman, 18-year-old Anastasia De Sousa, was dead.

•(1600)

There were also 16 people injured, including a young man who will have to spend the rest of his life with one bullet in his head and another in his neck, because it is too dangerous to remove them. Kimveer Gill, the murderer also died.

My two sons, Alec and Nicholas, could have been there. They went to that school; they were students at Dawson. Several people that I know were there and could have been victims. I am not talking about a cops and robbers movie. I am talking about my life, and what happened to my friends and me.

I have a third story that is even closer to home. I warned my colleagues that these would not be happy stories. This time it was in my riding, Hochelaga, and a member of my family was involved. It occurred on July 14, 2009, in Montreal, at the Jardins de l'Aubade, an independent and assisted living residence for seniors. Marlena Cardoso was a 33-year-old nurse and the mother of two young children. Everybody describes her as jovial, dedicated and likable. She was well liked and nobody, of course, wished her any harm. She was at work that day and at about 2:30 p.m. had a conversation with Celso Gentili. He was an 84-year-old man in a wheelchair. She thought he looked sick and wanted him to go to the hospital, and she

told him so. Mr. Gentili misinterpreted her remarks, became angry and went back to his apartment. The apartments are for people who are losing their mobility or live alone. Nobody had searched his apartment, just as no one searches our apartments when we move in. Once in his apartment, Mr. Gentili retrieved his 12-gauge shotgun and, without warning, shot Ms. Cardoso.

My younger brother, Guy, who had been working there for a few weeks, arrived on the scene and saw Ms. Cardoso on the ground in a pool of blood; there was blood everywhere. The owner's son was trying to overpower Mr. Gentili and disarm him, while Mr. Gentili was attempting to reload his rifle so he could continue to shoot. My younger brother had both hands on Marlena's gaping wound in an attempt to stop the blood and save her life. He was talking to her all the while, telling her to stay with them. He saved her life. I am very proud of him. He was trying to keep her alive, but while he was doing that, he too could have died because Mr. Gentili was attempting to reload his rifle. If no one had stopped him, he could have shot my brother. Once again, it was not a movie; it happened in my riding, to my family.

Marlena Cardoso was fortunate enough to survive in the end. But she and some other employees were so traumatized that two and a half years later they still have not returned to work. My brother is strong, but he still cries today when anyone talks about the incident. Mr. Gentili, the 84-year-old man, is facing seven charges. It is all very sad.

The Conservatives say that the long gun registry targets law-abiding citizens rather than criminals. In the three cases I referred to, none of the people involved were hardened criminals.

•(1605)

The aggressors did not have a criminal record, and the crimes were not committed by criminals. The registry identifies firearm owners and assists in keeping track of the circulation of weapons, which may be sold. Abolishing the registry would therefore make it easier for potentially dangerous people to get a hold of weapons, whether or not they have previously committed a crime. That makes the lives of police officers harder and puts them in harm's way. The Conservatives say that the registry is a waste of taxpayers' money. Have the Conservatives ever calculated the cost of violence due to long guns? One single investigation—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. I made a small mistake. You have 10 more minutes.

•(1610)

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Right, I will slow down.

A single murder investigation costs about a half-million dollars. In addition to that there are the costs of hospitalization, long-term care and imprisonment, which could continue to grow. So we are talking about millions and even billions of dollars. And of course that is not counting another very significant cost, the psychological cost to the families of the victims and the victims themselves.

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The Conservatives also want to destroy all of the information accumulated for the long gun registry. Police associations, which query the registry an average of 17,000 times a day, are completely against it, as is my province, Quebec. If the registry were unfortunately to disappear, at least the provinces could use the information, not information from all the provinces, but from their own, to protect the people there, because the federal government seems to be refusing to do it.

The murders at the École Polytechnique in Montreal in 1989 that I referred to earlier prompted a lot of people to think about ways to at least try to prevent that kind of tragedy, as much as possible. Out of that came the firearms registry. Do we really want to move backward? Do we want to tell the families of Anastasia De Sousa, Geneviève Bergeron, Hélène Colgan, Nathalie Croteau, Barbara Daigneault, Anne-Marie Edward, Maud Haviernick, Maryse Laganière, Maryse Leclair, Anne-Marie Lemay, Sonia Pelletier, Michèle Richard, Annie St-Arnault, Annie Turcotte, Barbara Kluczniak-Widajewicz—pardon me, Barbara—and all the other victims that their deaths were ultimately for nothing? Do we want to take risks with people's lives? My answer is clear: no. The way we can really protect lives is by strengthening gun control. In my opinion, even one life is worth it.

[*English*]

Mr. Gerald Keddy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a short time ago in the House, the member for Yukon spoke, and he quoted Robert Service. I am sure the member opposite is familiar with Robert Service, a bard of northern Canada. However, he did not quote from another poem of Robert Service:

When out of the night, which was fifty below, and into the din and the glare,
There stumbled a miner fresh from the creeks, dog-dirty, and loaded for bear.

The reason I quote that is because here is someone who was out in the cold and the dark, and came into the warmth and the light.

I appreciate the hon. member's passion for this subject, but I do not understand how everything that says registration is good, when in reality we are registering licensed gun owners.

As a hunter and a gun owner, if I get stopped for running a red light, the RCMP would put my name through the database. They would get the same results today as they would have gotten prior to the elimination of the registry because I am still a licensed, registered gun owner, so the safety aspect that we talk about is still there. To say it is not is just contrary to logic.

•(1615)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I know that the law is not perfect and that there are ways to change it. Before we can change it, however, we have to keep it. We must not throw the baby out with the bathwater.

Suppose there are changes that could be made when it comes to the north, for example. In order to be able to make those changes, we have to have this law on the books. If we vote with the Conservatives and abolish it, there is no way to improve it.

[*English*]

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulages, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to mention that one of the names that was not mentioned by my hon. colleague was that of Heidi Rathjen, who was one of the lucky ones who was not killed that terrible night. The hon. member mentioned stories close to her home. Heidi Rathjen was a woman who grew up in my home town. I went to elementary school with her sister Claudia. I know the family very well and I know how that act of violence deeply touched that family in particular.

Ms. Rathjen has been very vocal over the years about the preservation of the gun registry. I am wondering if my hon. colleague could elaborate on the consequences if the registry is scrapped and Ms. Rathjen's fear that gun-related tragedies will increase as a result.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. There are a lot of crimes committed with shotguns, long guns. There is talk of removing these weapons from the firearms registry. Imagine a police officer who responds to a call from a family—a husband and wife—and he has information from the registry. Neither party is a criminal. And yet, if the police officer knows, based on information from the registry, that there are firearms in the house, long guns, he can respond differently and protect the lives of the people in the house as well as his own life.

Moreover, many people have said that having a registry really improved things. For example, I would like to quote Pamela Harrison, provincial coordinator for the Transition House Association of Nova Scotia, an organization that provides emergency services to women who are victims of violence and abuse:

[*English*]

The long-gun registry has made a significant difference in the safety of women in Canada since its inception in 1995. The rate of spousal homicide by gun has gone down 69 per cent and we attribute most of that to the impact of the gun registry.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her very heartfelt presentation and for sharing her direct experience with the need to have a registry to track the illegal use of long guns.

This matter has been reviewed in previous Parliaments and presentations have been put forward by a vast array of people. The Canadian Association of Police Boards, the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians, the Ontario Public Health Association, the Medical Officer of Health of Toronto, the Canadian Federation of University Women, and the National Council of Women of Canada all support retaining the gun registry.

I am told that the officers were able to locate and try to convict the two people involved in the Mayerthorpe, Alberta killing of the RCMP officers because of the gun registry. That is only one of many examples given to me by the police and the police chief in the city I come from. I am told that yes, there is a handful of police officers who have private collections and do not like having to register, but generally speaking, the police of Canada support the use of this tool.

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●(1620)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, that is quite accurate.

Moreover, in Canada, only three police chiefs disapprove of the registry. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police is totally in favour of the registry and does not want to see it scrapped. So what my colleague said, and what my other colleagues also intimated, is exactly what we just heard: police officers are against the abolition of the long gun registry. That says a great deal.

[*English*]

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the speech that was given by my colleague across the way. These stories are very heart wrenching and our hearts go out to the victims of these tragedies. To link the registry with these, however, is disingenuous. Experts who examined what happened at École Polytechnique admitted that the registry probably would have had no effect on what happened. The member cited the Dawson College tragedy. In fact, the gun was registered.

It does not make any difference to have a registry. It would be much better to take the billions of dollars that were spent and target the root causes of these things and try to find these individuals in society and deal with them. We will not solve these types of problems with a gun registry.

I wonder if the member has any comments about that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, it is true that having a registry will not completely wipe out crime. I am very aware of that.

Moreover, the crimes were committed with weapons that were registered. I know that. However, do we really know how many crimes were prevented as a result of the registry? We know which crimes were committed with registered firearms, but what we do not know is how many were prevented as a result of the firearms being registered.

I am now going to read out another quote. Sue O'Sullivan, the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime stated that the majority of groups representing victims want to keep the registry. That is also telling. She said:

[*English*]

Our position on this matter is clear—Canada must do all it can to prevent further tragedies from happening, including using the tools we have to help keep communities safe, like the long-gun registry.

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Fundy Royal.

I congratulate the Minister of Public Safety, the member of Parliament for Provencher, for bringing forward Bill C-19. This is an incredible day. Finally, there is a government bill before the House for debate. After all the long years that I have been advocating against the long gun registry, finally we have this opportunity not only to debate the bill, but to vote on it and successfully remove the long gun registry.

I also want to thank the member for Portage—Lisgar, who is also the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, for all the work she has done on the gun registry and for bringing forward Bill C-391 in the last Parliament which we had hoped to get through the House until it ripped my heart out to see it defeated by one vote. However, I know that she has continued to fight for the removal of this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. She has travelled across the country to hear from Canadians from coast to coast about the horrors of having to deal with such a bureaucratic process, one that made criminals out of law-abiding citizens.

Finally, I have to thank my friend, the member for Yorkton—Melville, for all of the work he has done right back to 1993-94 when this registry was first floated by Allan Rock, the minister at that time, and the Liberal government. The member for Yorkton—Melville has been one of the stalwarts. He has fought against this ineffective and wasteful use of taxpayer money and has ensured that we do the right things in fighting crime rather than penalize citizens who happen to own long guns, whether they are farmers, hunters, or sportsmen.

I was fighting Bill C-68 going back to 1995. The Senate committee was travelling across the country taking testimony on Bill C-68. I appeared before that committee when it was in Manitoba, in Interlake in my riding.

People in my riding of Selkirk—Interlake have long opposed this gun registry. It created a huge stir. There were public protests. Organizations were set up. I joined the Manitoba Firearms Coalition. People wanted to fight this huge impediment to their freedoms and their rights as citizens. Unfortunately, Bill C-68 has pitted rural Canadians against urban Canadians.

Maybe it is not fair for me to say that urban Canadians all support the gun registry, because there are plenty of hunters and sports enthusiasts who live in urban centres who also oppose this long gun registry. Over the last few years as we have been out campaigning, we have been hearing from Canadians in urban centres. They know it is not working. They know the registry has not reduced crime. They have seen gun violence and gang violence in the streets rise. They know the registry is a waste of money. They want more resources put into policing services. They want more money put into gang prevention. They want more money put into youth at risk. They know those will be the right investments, rather than wasting money on a bureaucracy, on a registry that has no impact whatsoever in reducing crime in this country.

I am a licensed firearms owner. I acquired a PAL, a possession and acquisition licence. I took my hunter safety course in 1976 when I was about 14 years old. The hunter safety course is what actually prepared me to get my PAL. I am a licensed firearms owner; however, I have never registered a firearm. I do have a firearm, but it is not registered. I have made that statement before in the House because, as a matter of civil disobedience, I have always said this is a wrong thing. That firearm does not have any impact on the safety of people. It is the people who handle the firearm that are the issue.

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If we want to look at reducing crime or reducing accidents that happen from handling firearms, we need to do more in the areas of safe storage, safe handling, in training the people who are going to be using firearms. That is where we would get the biggest bang for our buck.

We know from the statistics that since the late 1980s we have seen a reduction in accidental shootings. We have seen a reduction in misfired guns. We have seen a reduction in suicides that have been caused from long guns.

We have seen reductions in those events because people are practising safe storage. Those firearms are under lock and key. Ammunition is stored separately under lock and key. It is more difficult for children to access those firearms. It allows time for cooling off in instances of heated debates between friends or family members. It allows people to think about what they are doing as they are reaching for a firearm they may want to use in an illegal way.

•(1625)

Much misinformation has been propagated by opposition members and we really need to set things straight. They talk about policing services accessing the gun registry thousands of times a day. They are not actually accessing the registry. They may be checking an address or licence plate and that automatically goes into the firearms registry. If they are looking at a serial number of a gun, it accesses the licensed firearm owner. That is not going to change. There still will be a complete list of everyone who has a licence to possess a firearm in this country. That will not change. We know that police officers on the front line can still enter an address or licence plate number into a computer and they will be told whether an individual is a licensed firearms owner.

Police officers will have to deal with every individual as if he or she owned a firearm. We do not want to give them a false sense of security. They have to assume in every situation they go into that there are firearms present. We know that criminals do not register firearms. We know that criminals do not get licences under the current legislation. Criminals do not have possession and acquisition licences for firearms. We know that to be a fact. In every situation for their own self-interests, police officers have to enter a premise or approach a vehicle as if the individual had a gun.

There is all this talk about homicide rates dropping because of the gun registry. We know that homicide rates have been on the decline since the early 1970s. Since the registry came into being in Canada, the rate has stabilized at just under 1.9 murders per 100,000 people. There will not be a huge impact, because homicides have been stable on a percentage basis for the last dozen years or so since the registry has been in place.

If we look at the population of licensed firearm owners, the murder rate is only .38 per 100,000 owners of firearms. These are the most law-abiding citizens in the country. These are individuals who have gone out of their way to become licensed firearms owners and to get the training they need to own firearms. They are the ones who respect the laws of the land. Why are we targeting these individuals when there are so many other people who are involved in gangs, drugs and illicit crimes? Those are the individuals we need to invest in finding, tracking and getting off our streets to make our neighbourhoods safer.

Professor Gary Mauser has said that of all the murders that have been committed since 1997, less than 2% of them have been committed by licensed firearm owners and the guns that were registered to those individuals only represented 1.2% of homicides. The question then becomes, was that a good use of taxpayer dollars? Over \$2 billion was spent to track 1.25% of those who committed homicides in this country and owned long guns. That is ridiculous.

In Vancouver in 2003, of all the guns that were taken off the street, 97% of them were illegal handguns that were smuggled in. We have to start looking at the big issue. Let us quit focusing on one group in society that we, unfortunately, made into criminals because they did not register their firearms. Half the guns on the streets today are still not registered. Let us do the right thing and get rid of the long gun registry and invest in front-line policing.

•(1630)

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite the same kind of question I posed earlier. Since he freely admitted his guns are not registered, should his residence be broken into and it happens that a police officer discovers the break-in and chases after the criminals but has no idea that there are guns on the premise and is subsequently killed, what will he say to the family of that police officer?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, police officers enter every premise under the suspicion that there is a firearm present. They have to. Otherwise they would be taking unnecessary risks. They do not go in all guns ablazing, but at the same time they go in there in a defensive mode.

I have met with policing agencies. I had them come to my office when we were debating Bill C-391. I have talked to officers in my riding and they tell me time and time again that at the front line level they have to approach every situation as if that individual has a firearm whether it shows up in the computer database or not.

At the same time, we will make the investments to ensure, and we have already done this since we formed government in 2006, we make things better to help our police officers. We are working on the tackling violent crimes act. We are working on tackling auto theft and trafficking of property obtained by crime, ensuring we are getting that off the streets. We are creating a new offence of drive-by and reckless shootings. We are also standing united, without hesitation, on why the long gun registry should be scrapped for law-abiding citizens. We are going to put in place laws that help police officers get criminals off our streets and we are not going to make criminals of law-abiding citizens.

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• (1635)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to continue a line of questioning that I have put to other members. Municipal jurisdictions always want to co-operate, as much as possible, and build relationships with Ottawa. However, in this case the province of Quebec has told the federal government that it sees value in retaining a gun registry for the province of Quebec.

By Ottawa saying no, that it cannot have access to that data bank, would the member then agree that Quebec is now going to have to re-establish its own data bank, thereby spending a lot more money than it would have had to as opposed to just getting a copy of the data bank from Ottawa? The biggest loser is likely to be the taxpayer.

Would the member agree with that assessment?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Winnipeg North for stating the obvious. Every province has under the Constitution the right to register property. That is why cars are registered provincially. That is why land titles are held provincially. If the province of Quebec wants to register firearms, it can do that. That is within its constitutional jurisdiction.

However, the registry that was started and created by the Liberals, their legacy which we are going to destroy and which I am quite proud of, is a federal registry. This is an opportunity for us to respect the private rights of individuals and to destroy that information so it never gets out in the public again.

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Selkirk—Interlake for all of the work he has done and the members of our party who have for many years tried to work with the police community and with victims to bring about what we believe is a more fair and just system.

I know that he, like many members of the party and many members involved in this debate, have spoken to front-line police officers and police chiefs. There is a bit of a misnomer that somehow the police have been crying for the continuation of this registry and that simply is not the case. I have spoken to people like Sergeant Duane Rutledge and Chief Chisholm in my home community of New Glasgow and they tell me that they approach every call, particularly where there may be violence, as if there will be a weapon involved. There is this idea that the registry is necessary, that it will provide fair warning, but police officers already approach every call as if there may be impending danger.

Could the member comment on that scenario?

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of National Defence for that great insight. As I said in my speech, police officers have to approach every situation, and they are trained to approach every situation, as if there is a weapon present.

The one thing I did not get to in my speech is that the front-line police officers are wasting all sorts of time and valuable resources in administration on things like the gun registration, when we should be giving them the time to go out and investigate actual crimes.

Hon. Rob Moore (Fundy Royal, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege to rise today on behalf of my constituents of Fundy Royal to speak to what I think is a very important debate.

Because it took a long time to get to this point, I would like to thank a couple of people, one of whom is the member for Yorkton—Melville. The member led a long, detailed, very thorough fight for the rights of everyday hard-working, law-abiding citizens, the type of citizens who live in my riding of Fundy Royal. He is to be commended. As members of Parliament, we are dealing with the aftermath of this Liberal boondoggle that was created in the 1990s by individuals who, by all accounts, had an agenda. I recall the then minister of justice, Allan Rock, saying that he came to Ottawa with the firm belief that only police and the military should have firearms. That is truly an out-of-touch point of view. It gives us a perspective on the driving motivation behind the registry. Not only is it truly scary for our country, but it truly targets the wrong individuals.

I want to personally thank the member for Yorkton—Melville for standing up for my constituents as well as all Canadians during those days, finding out all the problems and attacking the cause of the many issues that were foisted upon law-abiding citizens. This is a culmination of that work.

I have a few questions that I think responsible parliamentarians have to answer when discussing any changes to the law. On the firearms registry, I have a few of questions. Who does it target? Does it work? Are taxpayers getting good value? I think those are some fundamental questions, and I will look at a few of those in my remarks.

Who does it target? As has been said by the previous speaker, as members of Parliament, whether we are in urban, suburban or rural areas, we know that the gun registry targets the law-abiding gun owner. It is the person who will send in the forms by email or hard copy or who will wait in lines.

When the registry was brought in, I remember seeing many of the law-abiding good people in my region lining up for hours at the McAllister Place Mall to go through the process of registering their firearms. Meanwhile, the Hells Angels, organized crime, gangs from the west coast to the east coast merely went about their business. I suppose some of them might have had a chuckle at the thought of all the law-abiding citizens in our country, many of them senior citizens, lining up to register their firearms, while they perhaps were about to go and buy a smuggled handgun out of the trunk of a car.

The registry was targeting the law-abiding citizen, not the bad guy. That is why, even then in the 1990s, right-thinking people knew that the registry would never work. It was predicted by the member for Yorkton—Melville, for example, that the registry would not work because, for that fundamental issue, it targeted the wrong people. How can we solve a crime problem if we do not target criminals? It has been the benefit of time, the passage of a decade and a half, that we have seen individuals who said all along that it would not work proven completely, 100%, right.

Government Orders

Although I have run on a platform of fighting against the registry in my political career, I would be the first to say that if I and my constituents thought this registry worked, if we thought it prevented crime, if we thought that it saved lives, we would have a different position. However we know, intuitively and with the benefit of the passage of time and the wonderful statistics that we have available to us, that the registry simply does not work because it targets the wrong people.

• (1640)

Does it work? The answer is a resounding no. We have seen this in some of the tragedies that have happened since the registry has been in place. The registry did nothing to prevent some of the crimes that took place.

I will move on to the final question. Even in light of the fact that it does nothing to prevent crime and it does not work, is it a good value? Are we at least paying very little for it? Is it not enough money to really be too upset about?

We know the Liberals have always been good with budgeting. That is one thing we will give them. We know at the time that the minister said the registry would cost net to the taxpayers about \$2 million. Some people might have thought, since it was the Liberals saying this, let us go by a factor of ten and it might cost \$20 million, or even a factor 100 and it might cost \$200 million considering it was a Liberal estimate. In fact, we know, through the work of professors, from the work of the member of Yorkton—Melville in accumulating statistics and from the work of the auditor general, that the estimate for the cost of the registry rose to \$2 billion. That is \$2 billion for a registry that targets my constituents, law-abiding people and does not work.

How can we allow something like that to continue? The short answer is we cannot. That is why I am very pleased that we have a government now that is committed to doing the right thing in ending this abomination to the taxpayer.

In a previous Parliament we had a private member's bill, Bill C-391, that would get rid of the gun registry. Members on this side of the House supported that private member's bill. Interestingly enough, we heard a lot of members opposite, who used to go into their riding, maybe to their fish game clubs or sports shooting federation, say that they were against the registry, that they would fight against it and vote against it. Some members said all of those things, except when it actually counted. When it came time to vote on the bill, the members opposite, in just enough numbers, voted to defeat it.

It was there and then that I and my colleagues came to the realization that the only way to defeat the registry was to form a majority government. That is why I am very glad that on May 2, our government was elected with a clear mandate. It was a mandate to act to protect everyday law-abiding citizens. It was a mandate for safer streets and communities and to end the wasteful long gun registry.

Unlike my friend, I did register my firearms. One of them was very common in New Brunswick and coast to coast. It was an old .303 Lee Enfield rifle. It is one that our military has used for decades.

In fact, in the north people continue to use them, but those rifles will be replaced now.

Since those rifles did not have a serial number that would be appropriate for the registry, I received in the mail an orange sticker that had a number on it with instructions from the Registrar of Firearms to affix the sticker to the old Lee Enfield rifle. I never did put it on the rifle, but I kept that sticker as a reminder of all the absurdities that came from the registry and the fact that it targeted the wrong people. I keep that as a reminder to stay dedicated, as we all have, to keep moving forward in the right direction.

For our part, our government will continue in our battle against crime to target the cause of crime. In our view, that is the criminals. Canadians are with us on that. We will continue to fight for safer streets, safer communities and we will do that by targeting criminals. We are going to end the targeting of law-abiding citizens by ending the gun registry.

• (1645)

[Translation]

Ms. Élaine Michaud (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleasantly surprised to have been given the floor.

We have heard a great deal of propaganda and political rhetoric on this matter from the other side of the House. But I believe that the worst thing I have heard so far is the idea of destroying all the information collected with the money of taxpayers from across the country in order to prevent the next government, when the Conservatives are inevitably defeated in four years, from handing the registry to the provinces, as several of them would like.

I do not understand how this argument can be used to justify this decision when provinces such as Quebec are calling for access to this information, which they helped pay for, in order to ensure the safety of the people, which is one of their provincial responsibilities.

I would like to know how an ideological decision, such as preventing future governments from reinstating the registry, could be a logical part of its discourse with the provinces.

• (1650)

[English]

Hon. Rob Moore: Mr. Speaker, our Minister of Public Safety put it well. To understand why we would do that, one would need to understand about keeping one's word, keeping one's commitment and keeping one's solemn pledge to one's constituents. Many members across the way have flip-flopped on this issue, but the commitment that I and my party made in the last election was that we would end the registry. The registry is a collection of a bunch of useless information on law-abiding citizens' property that does nothing to prevent crime.

How can we say that we will end the registry and then introduce a bill that ends the registry, but then turn all that information over so someone else can continue on with it? That, in my view, would be a terrific act of bad faith. We have committed to ending the registry, and that is exactly what we will do.

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Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but notice that a number of Conservative members speak with a great deal of passion on this issue, and I appreciate that. I suspect that some of them might have even built their entire political career on the gun registry issue. I must admit that I felt like I almost had to ask one of the pages to bring a box of Kleenex over to the member.

I suspect a huge vacuum will need to be filled. I am wondering what the next mission will be. Will the next mission be the NRA directive to amend the Constitution so that every man has the right to bear arms? One of my favourites would be to fight for universal health care across the country.

After Bill C-19 is disposed of, what will the member's next mission be going forward?

Hon. Rob Moore: What a sad question, Mr. Speaker. I am glad for the members on this side of the House who came to Ottawa with a mission and a mandate. They came to Ottawa with the view that they wanted to change things, that they wanted to change some of the mess that the member's party left behind, including the \$2 billion boondoggle.

We have no shortage of things that we want to continue to do for everyday, law-abiding Canadians, the people who we represent. I am saddened that the member does not have enthusiasm for any issue. We are enthused on this side. We are enthused about strengthening the Criminal Code so that we can protect our citizens and our communities. We are enthused about strengthening the economy, as we have done. Canada has a leading economy among the G8. We are enthused about ending this registry, which we are about to do. There is no shortage of things to be enthused about.

I hope that the enthusiasm we have on this side is contagious over there and the hon. member can grab on to an issue that he feels strongly about.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today because I believe that it is my fundamental duty to participate in this debate on behalf of my constituents who, like me, are concerned, shocked and upset by the very unfortunate legislative step that the Conservative government has taken by introducing its bill to dismantle the firearms registry as quickly as possible, and even going so far as to impose a gag order on this debate.

It is my duty to point out that I am also very disappointed that the government imposed a gag order this morning before the debate had even begun. This debate focuses on an issue that is at the heart of a broader debate on the type of society in which Canadians want to live. I am convinced that this bill, this ill-conceived plan to eliminate the firearms registry, will undermine Canada's public safety in the long term.

My constituents in Lac-Saint-Louis and the Montreal area feel very strongly about the issue of gun control. In the past 25 years, Montreal has experienced three massacres, all at post-secondary institutions. For those who are not familiar with the island of Montreal's urban geography, I will point out that these three tragedies occurred in a fairly small area of downtown Montreal: the

École Polytechnique of the Université de Montréal, Concordia University and Dawson College are all located within several blocks of each other.

Furthermore, I believe that there are only about 10 streets between Dawson College—where I myself taught some 15 years ago—and Concordia University. The École Polytechnique is clearly a little further north on the other side of the mountain, but all of these institutions are located within a fairly small area.

• (1655)

[*English*]

This, at least for me and my party, is not about the integrity of gun owners. The vast majority of long gun owners who I know are sterling citizens. They are community volunteers. Many would give the shirt off their back. They believe in community and in a safe community. They believe in safe streets. Some are first responders and I am proud to know them. That gun owners are respectable, responsible citizens is reflected empirically in the fact that 90% of gun owners have registered their firearms. In other words, despite their sometimes annoyance and, in many cases, strong opposition to the requirement to register their firearms, they register them all the same. That speaks volumes for their character. They are lawful citizens who do their duty. Some gun owners even voted for me, despite our differences on this contentious issue, which speaks volumes about the open mindedness of voters in my riding of Lac-Saint-Louis.

Why does the gun registry work? It is because of gun owners themselves. It is because of their deep sense of responsibility. I believe that gun owners' inherent sense of responsibility is reinforced by the requirement to register their firearms. This sense of responsibility further translates into a heightened sense of the need for proper and safe storage of firearms. There is a logical connection, therefore, in my view, between the registration of any object and the proper care of that object. If vehicles were not registered, people would feel free to abandon their old jalopies in a field somewhere at the end of the car's useful life knowing that no one would come knocking on their door later on to say, "Hey, you left your car on the street there, taking up space. Please cart it away or you'll be fined". I think the fact of registering makes people feel much more responsible for whatever the particular item is.

It is most unfortunate that, over the years, the government, or the Conservative caucus when in opposition, tried to reinforce the notion and create a feeling among gun owners that they should feel like criminals because they were being asked to register their firearms. The government was wrong in its ongoing attempts to convince gun owners that a society that has a requirement to register firearms is a society that sees them as criminals. Even though gun owners are lawful and responsible citizens, the government should, nonetheless, talk straight to them. The government should make clear the legal and constitutional truth about firearms and that there is no unfettered constitutional right in Canada to bear arms. As a matter of fact, in the case of *R. v. Wiles*, the court stated, "Possession and use of firearms is a heavily regulated privilege". The operative phrase is, of course, "heavily regulated".

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We have heard from the other side of the House examples of and references to gun owners who are farmers and hunters, gun owners who live in rural areas. The image that is projected is of people who are responsible and use guns as a tool in their daily work, such as farmers and so on. Obviously, that image is correct in many cases, but the government seems to be focusing on that romantic image of gun owners to justify its legislation. As I say, this is reflective of many gun owners in Canada.

• (1700)

I would submit that the type of gun owner we have in Canada is changing. It is no longer necessarily farmers who are working to keep animals that should not be on their land or off their land.

Jeff Davis in the *Edmonton Journal* of October 25 wrote:

The consumer tastes of Canadian gun owners are fast changing, as shooters eschew vintage hunting rifles in favour of the latest "tacti-cool" military-style weapons - many of which appear in movies and popular video games, such as Call of Duty. As a new generation of young men become interested in shooting, but not hunting, retailers are trying to meet the growing demand for sleek firearms. Canadian authorities, meanwhile, facing the repeal of the long-gun registry by the federal government, are worried about the trend.

These non-restricted, because they are long guns essentially even though they are replicas of military-style weapons, military-style long guns are referred to as civilianized versions of military assault weapons. In some cases it is possible to modify what are essentially stylized long guns into a gun that is more dangerous and would meet the criteria for being classified as a restricted weapon.

It is entirely possible, and it has happened quite recently, that a long gun is allowed into Canada and it is allowed to be sold as a non-restricted weapon, only for the RCMP on second thought to say, "It is a little too dangerous. It can be modified. We will now classify it as a restricted weapon. We had better get hold of those copies that were previously sold as non-restricted weapons".

To give an example, the Norinco Type 97 rifle was initially classified by the RCMP as a non-restricted weapon, and about 50 were sold in Canada. The RCMP firearms directorate later reclassified the Type 97 as a prohibited weapon. Letters were sent to 50 owners who already had them, asking them to turn the new guns in to their local police stations.

As a matter of basic logic, if these guns are not registered when they are first sold as non-restricted firearms, how would the RCMP send letters to the owners asking them to turn their guns in? In this case, we can see that the registry would be useful.

Rifles and shotguns were responsible for half the police officers killed in the line of duty over the past few years. We have been talking a lot about common sense and intuition. The previous speaker said that for him it was a matter of intuition. I can understand that. There are some common sense arguments in debates like this because we are not dealing with hard science, we are dealing with social science, research in social science studies, so indeed we have to at times resort to a kind of moral intuition.

Let us start with a recent study by Étienne Blais and Marie-Pier Gagné of the University of Montreal, who studied the data and looked at the enactment of Bill C-51 in 1977, requiring gun owners to obtain a firearm acquisition certificate. They looked at Bill C-68 in 1995, which set up the gun registry and so on. They found, in

doing their analysis, that these pieces of legislation were responsible for a 5% to 10% decrease in homicides committed with a firearm, depending on the province.

Studies have also shown that those who live in a home with one firearm have a higher risk of being victims of homicide. The risk quite obviously goes up if safe storage requirements are not respected in the household.

The Conservatives would say, echoing the rhetoric of the National Rifle Association in the United States, that it is not guns that kill people; it is people who kill people, and that removing firearms would simply cause a one for one shift toward another means or another weapon of homicide. However, this argument has been rejected by solid research, namely by Philip Cook in his 1981 study entitled "The Effect of Gun Availability on Violent Crime Patterns". He said:

A decision to kill is easier and safer to implement with a gun than with other commonly available weapons- there is less danger of effective victim resistance during the attack—

• (1705)

I think we can understand the logic behind that:

—and the killing can be accomplished more quickly and impersonally, with less sustained effort than is usually required with a knife or blunt object.

Let us remember another thing. Homicides committed with a firearm are not, as the Conservatives would have us believe, premeditated acts. They are often impulsive acts committed under the influence of alcohol. This makes the safe storage of firearms and measures like the registry, which are intended to encourage safe storage, all the more relevant, in my view. However, there is an issue that has not really been discussed in this debate to date, as far as I can tell, and that is the issue of firearms and suicide.

We just had a debate on suicide a couple of weeks ago, in which members weighed in with very earnest and well-motivated speeches. However, in this debate on the gun registry, we have not heard much about suicide, at least from the other side. Suicide accounts for nearly three-quarters of all firearm-related deaths in Canada. Last year a Quebec National Institute of Public Health study found that male suicide rates declined notably following the introduction of firearms legislation.

As a matter of common sense, removing the means of suicide will naturally affect the suicide rate and the means of suicide can vary according to country. For example, in China and India death by pesticide intake is more common. Subsequently, the development of strict controls on access to and storage of pesticides and industrial poisons has resulted in a reduction of suicide rates in those countries.

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The government also likes to talk about how it stands up for victims, yet l'Association canadienne pour la prévention du suicide, l'Association des familles de personnes assassinées ou disparues, l'Association québécoise Plaidoyer-Victimes, and the Federal Ombudsman for Victims of Crime are all calling for the gun registry to remain in place.

This brings me to another point and it relates to a point I mentioned earlier. We can get into a battle of duelling studies, we understand that. We are in the realm of social science. Sometimes the same set of data yields very different conclusions. Just a couple of weeks ago an emergency medicine academic, Caillin Langmann, published a study. He looked at the major pieces of gun control legislation: the 1977 bill that required criminal record checks, the 1991 bill that imposed mandatory safety training and a 28-day waiting period for purchase, and the 1995 long gun registry legislation. What he came up with as a conclusion was that he failed to definitively demonstrate an association between firearms legislation and homicide between 1974 and 2008. I would mention that the study does not cover suicide.

Members on the other side will be saying, "We told you so", there is a study that says that none of these pieces of legislation work. One of the pieces of legislation that did not work, according to this study, was the legislation requiring a firearms acquisition certificate or, in other words, licensing in order to be a firearms owner. By this logic, the government should not stop at getting rid of the registry. It should be getting rid of the licensing provisions in Canadian law as well, but we know it is not doing that. I believe that, with all due respect to my colleagues on the other side, they are cherry-picking the evidence in some ways.

There are some people in Canada at the moment, the Canadian Taxpayers Federation and others, who would like to see gun licensing eliminated and would probably use a study like Mr. Langmann's to justify the cost-saving push to eliminate licensing, which, of course, must make farmers, hunters and law-abiding gun owners feel like criminals, according to the government's logic.

What strikes me the most about some of the arguments I have heard on the other side of the House is the statement that has been made often over the last few months that the gun registry has not saved one single life. That is quite a sweeping statement. Now we are in the realm of government omniscience and absolutism. I could never make a statement like that about pretty much any kind of phenomenon that cannot be measured scientifically.

•(1710)

How do we know it has not saved a life? For example, in the Dawson tragedy the police were able to use the registry to remove firearms from a potential copycat who might have committed the same crime after witnessing what Kimveer Gill did.

Would the government admit that it is at least possible that there is even a 1% chance that the gun registry may have saved at least one life? I believe the members opposite speak in good faith on this issue, and any member in good faith would have to admit that there is a possibility. Then the question becomes, how much is one life worth? Of course, the government does not want to go there because that opens up a whole other can of worms, which is why, I guess, the

government makes categorical statements like, "The registry has never saved even one life".

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we heard a lot of things and I wish I could comment on every one. Maybe it has to come through a private conversation.

I wonder if the member is aware that in a four year period there were hundreds of breaches of the gun registry. By that, I mean the RCMP, by their own investigations, found that information was accessed and fell into the wrong hands almost 300 times. In fact, there were only about 80 instances where they were actually able to trace where that information went and charge the people. Therefore, when he asks the question, "Has it saved a life?", he also has to ask the question, "Has it cost a life?"

I want to point this out. People have registered their firearms and then have had their houses broken into. They have no way of explaining how that information came into the hands of the criminals who broke into their houses. Those criminals did not do the ordinary thing of taking everything, but searched until they found very valuable firearms, so there is a clear violation of property rights here, as well as the question from the other side.

I have also heard the argument from the other side, and I hope I have time to ask this one. The point was made to not destroy the information. The Auditor General revealed the fact that about 90% of the registration information was flawed. The question I have is, what would it cost to fix the registry? Seven million guns are registered—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I have known the hon. member by reputation since before I was elected. I worked here as an assistant when the hon. member first arrived in 1993, I believe it was. I know that this has been an issue that he has been studying for a very long time. I respect his knowledge and experience with this issue.

There are two things I would say. The member seems to be implying that somehow there have been breaches of security at the Canadian firearms centre and that the database has been broken into. That is what I think he is referring to. If that is true, we have a bigger problem here with the security of government records in general.

In terms of imperfect information, no doubt there is imperfect information, but there is a dictum that I sort of live by in politics. I think it is one that is often associated with politicians of conservative persuasion: perfection is the enemy of the good. If one is always seeking perfection, the perfect database, the perfect proof that the registry works, we are not going to achieve the common good. I take the member's point, and it is something I will obviously reflect on, but those are my answers to his points.

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•(1715)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are reminded by Dr. Leslie Tutty, who is with the University of Calgary faculty of social work, that long guns are the firearms most often used to kill women and children in domestic violence situations. She reminds us that the Alberta Court of Appeal has noted that gun control is a women's issue, that women represent a small percentage of gun owners, but that they account for a high percentage of victims of gun violence. She also points out that firearms resulting in the death of women from the use of long guns has substantially been reduced since the introduction of gun control and that while the registry may be inconvenient to the gun owners it is necessary to protect women's safety.

I wonder if the member could speak about why we balance off protection of women versus inconvenience of a gun owner.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I am familiar with the point the hon. member is making. I recently read in the *National Post* that in the past 15 years homicides by rifle have dropped 50% and firearm homicides against women have dropped 30%.

Obviously, fewer homicides mean fewer men and women are killed. I am not familiar with all of the background on the issue as it relates to the rates of homicide for women.

The point at the core of the hon. member's question is whether annoyance should get in the way of doing what we have to do for whoever that benefits in society. In the case of firearms, it is women in many cases. I do not like going to the motor vehicle bureau to get the registration for my car and I know that the people who are stealing cars do not have a registration. It is the same logic that some of my colleagues across the way have used.

Mr. Ray Boughey (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to my colleague's speech. He mentioned a couple of issues I found rather startling.

The member said he was shocked by the legislation to ban registration of long guns and that the whole thing is ill-conceived. I ask the member why was he shocked and why is it ill-conceived?

There were hundreds of hours of debate. Committees were struck and there were presentations by different people across Canada. It is not something that was done secretly. It has been out there for over a year.

I have one other comment. The *Calgary Sun* states:

So don't believe, even for a second, that police use the registry 17,000 times a day looking for guns.

That's fiction.

We know from our own research and from talking with police chiefs across Canada that police officers attend at domestic disputes figuring there are guns there and they follow their own procedures.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, what I said, and I stand to be corrected, was that many of my constituents are shocked and greatly disappointed that the government has gone ahead with this.

Of course that is no surprise to me. I have been following the issue for many years. All members in the House knew that at the first opportunity the government would use its majority to get rid of the registry.

Therefore, it is not a shock to me. However, many citizens in my province who were used to having the registry as a tool for protecting public safety and who thought it was a permanent thing are greatly disappointed.

In terms of the idea that officers approach every situation with the idea in the back of their mind that there could be a firearm, this is a psychological cognitive issue. When I drive my car I know someone could cut me off at any time and I drive defensively. However, when I see in my rear-view mirror someone who is driving at 150 miles an hour zigzagging in and out of traffic it has a psychological impact on me whether I like it or not.

That raises an important issue as to what the cognitive impacts are of having greater certainty based on the information in the registry.

•(1720)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment in terms of what the ongoing annual cost of the registry is now as well as how much it actually cost to put in place?

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, based on what I have read, my sense is that it costs about \$4 million year.

However, one has to look at things comparatively. I am not trying to be partisan but we know the government is liberal when it comes to advertising its budgetary initiatives. We have all heard the ads on the radio stating how wonderful the recently passed budget is.

If we have a choice to make it would be less investment in government advertising and self-promotion and more investment in public security.

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette.

It is a privilege to contribute to the debate and speak in support of Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill. It is a registry that has been wasteful and ineffective and should have been scrapped years ago. It has not prevented crime and has created criminals out of law-abiding farmers, hunters and sport shooters instead of tackling the real criminals.

I will speak to why it is crucial that we finally scrap the wasteful, ineffective long gun registry and will outline some of the important steps our government has taken to help Canadians be safer and deter criminals.

The government has delivered tougher sentences to deter serious and violent crimes, especially gun crimes, and keep dangerous people off our streets. It has provided our provincial and territorial partners with funding to put hundreds more front-line police officers on our streets. It has brought in new measures to fight organized crime, white-collar crime and human smuggling, and has made new investments in prevention to attack the root causes of crime to stop it before it happens.

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We are doing what works. We are doing what makes sense, which most certainly includes firearms control. Canadians expect effective measures to prevent and deal with gun crimes. That is what we are committed to delivering. However, that does not mean wasting millions of hard-working taxpayers' dollars to maintain a system that does not work.

Hon. members who followed the committee hearings for Bill C-391 last year know that we heard highly credible testimony from a number of respected experienced police officers who told us that the information provided by the long gun registry was not reliable. Some of these officers have estimated there may be as many as one million long guns that have never been registered. Thousands more have not been registered properly because model or catalogue numbers were used instead of serial numbers, while others have been registered multiple times. The long gun registry is not removing the guesswork; it is adding to it. It does not help anyone. It does not contribute to public safety.

The long gun registry has been in place for over a decade and we have yet to hear of a single instance where it has even been given partial credit for preventing a crime. If that were happening Canadians would support it. All indications are that they do not, and that includes Canadians who live in rural areas. Canadians are spending millions of dollars to maintain the registry with virtually no evidence to indicate it has any effect whatsoever on reducing gun crimes. That is not a good record, nor is it a good investment. It is not making our streets safer.

Our government believes in effective gun control. It believes in measures that work to prevent crime and are worth the money we invest in them, such as the requirement to have a licence before people can buy an unrestricted firearm, i.e., a rifle or a shotgun. Before they can get a licence they have to pass the Canadian firearms safety course. Before they can get a licence to buy and own a rifle or shotgun they also need to pass a background check which involves a criminal record check to ensure the individual is not under a court order prohibiting him or her from possessing a firearm as well as determining whether allowing the individual to have a firearm would pose a threat to public safety.

The Government of Canada is now investing \$7 million a year to make the screening process for people applying for a firearms licence even stronger with the very reasonable goal of preventing crime by working to keep firearms out of the hands of people who should not have them.

I want to emphasize to the House and to Canadians that Bill C-19 does not change these requirements. No one will be able to buy a firearm of any kind without passing the Canadian firearms safety course and a background check, as well as possessing a proper licence.

• (1725)

The bill will eliminate a law that places an unnecessary burden on law-abiding Canadians and on Canadian taxpayers. In doing so, it will free up resources for investment in anti-crime initiatives that will help make our streets safer.

We have to be honest with ourselves and face reality. The long gun registry is only effective and efficient at harassing law-abiding

farmers and outdoors enthusiasts. It does not prevent crime because we know that criminals do not register guns. Illegal handguns are the primary problem. The problem is not the legally acquired shotguns and rifles found in the hands of our farmers, hunters and target shooters. The firearms involved in the majority of gun crimes are not purchased by farmers for the protection of their livestock, are not owned by your neighbour down the road who goes moose hunting every fall with his brother or the aspiring athlete hoping to shine for Canada in the next Olympic biathlon, yet these are the people the long gun registry affects.

We all want to reduce crime, especially gun crime. Therefore, I ask hon. members to support Bill C-19. Let us invest in programs that are effective and eliminate those that are mere window dressing that divert our attention and our resources away from the real problem. It is time to scrap the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously for conservation of the registry.

What does the member say to Quebec police officers who use this tool on a daily basis?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, I say to Quebec police officers what I have said to officers throughout Canada, that this registry does nothing to prevent crime.

As I said in my remarks, it is a wasteful resource. As a government, we are investing in resources that will help police officers not only in Quebec but across the country fight crime. The elimination of this particular registry will save millions, in fact billions, of dollars. We can use that resource in a meaningful way to fight crime and get the real criminals.

• (1730)

[Translation]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respectfully ask my colleague the following: does he not believe that the amnesties the government has regularly granted to long gun owners could have encouraged several people to disobey the law and caused some confusion?

[English]

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, we encourage all Canadians to abide by the law. We encourage the effective and prudent use of crime-fighting tools. The registry is not a tool that effectively reduces crime.

The licensing of firearms is effective. The registry is a wasteful and ineffective use of taxpayers' money. We can put other resources to good use and fight criminals.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member, my colleague, for the very descriptive and excellent way in which he presented the case in favour of this very important legislation.

Government Orders

We have not heard from a single front-line officer in support of the argument to not scrap the registry. In fact, in the Conservative caucus we have 11 colleagues here in the House who have served in the noble profession of police officer for many years.

I know that this is a very important issue in the hon. member's riding. I would like to know if he has heard from any constituents who oppose this legislation in his riding. I certainly have not; has he?

Mr. Jay Aspin: Mr. Speaker, I have heard from many constituencies. I ran on this particular issue, and quite clearly the constituents across Nipissing—Timiskaming are telling me to get rid of the registry. It has been useless and has gone on far too long. It is a waste of money and should have been scrapped years ago.

I say to my constituents, "Promise made, promise kept".

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed an honour to speak on Bill C-19, a bill to eliminate the long gun registry. I would like to add my thanks to the member for Yorkton—Melville for his years of work on this file, and to thank as well the member for Portage—Lisgar for her terrific work on it.

My colleagues on this side of the House have spoken very well on the legal, law enforcement and financial downside of the long gun registry. I would like to add a slightly different perspective, that of a hunter.

I represent a vast and beautiful rural constituency in western Manitoba. Farmers, ranchers, loggers, hunters, outfitters, anglers and trappers are many of my constituents. It is a beautiful place with abundant wildlife and, like many of my constituents, I am a hunter.

Hunting is part of my culture and a way of life, as it is for many of my constituents. Interestingly, almost all the homes in my constituency have one or more firearms, yet the crime rate is very low.

Why is that? It is because where I live, we have a culture of respect for each other, our community and the land that sustains us. In fact, one could call it a peaceable kingdom. That is why I found the words of the member for Lac-Saint-Louis somewhat offensive when he assumed that people who had firearms were automatically suspect, or at least that is now I heard it.

My constituents are honest—

• (1735)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia: Mr. Speaker, I have never suggested that for a minute. As a matter of fact, I argued the opposite. I argued that gun owners are law-abiding and sterling citizens.

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, my constituents are honest country people who work hard and play by the rules. That is why we find the long gun registry so egregious and so offensive. When gun crimes are committed in far-off big cities, who gets punished? We do.

Parties opposite make a great show of their support for the working people and the "common man". I am particularly reminded of the old NDP versus the new NDP. The old NDP had a modicum

of respect for the people who live on the land, work hard and play by the rules. I am thinking of that party's former leader, Audrey McLaughlin, who, as I discovered after reading some *Hansards* from years back, had some serious doubts about the long gun registry. All parties opposite have evolved into parties of the big-government elites and union bosses, who strive to expand government control over the lives of these same working people that those members purport to support.

I am especially puzzled at the support for the long gun registry by Liberal and NDP members from Newfoundland and Labrador in the Maritimes, where they have such grand hunting traditions, such as the seal hunt in Newfoundland, moose hunting, bird hunting and all of that. I have even travelled to Newfoundland myself and have enjoyed the particular local delicacy called bottled moose. Those from Newfoundland know exactly what I am talking about.

For those of us who represent rural constituencies, and for my constituents in particular, I would say that our innate country common sense tells us that punishing law-abiding gun owners is simply not right.

To the people in my constituency a firearm is a tool, like a chainsaw or a tractor, that obviously must be used with care, but as freedom-loving Canadians, people in my constituency view firearms ownership as a symbol of their Canadian citizenship or a symbol of the trust that should exist between the people and their government.

I am reminded of what George Orwell said many years ago when he was commenting on firearms ownership by ordinary British citizens. It perhaps does not quite apply to us here, but it does have some wisdom. He said:

That rifle hanging on the wall of the working-class flat or labourer's cottage is the symbol of democracy. It is our job to see that it stays there.

Most firearms in Canada are owned for the purpose of hunting. For many of us who grew up hunting, it is a sacred activity that is often difficult to describe, so I will quote the eminent evolutionary psychologist Randall Eaton, who said of boys in particular in his book *From Boys to Men of Heart: Hunting as Rite of Passage*:

The instinct to hunt awakens spontaneously in boys, but the taking of a life opens the heart and tempers that instinct with compassion. If we want to transform boys into men who respect life and are responsible to society and the environment then we need to mentor them in hunting as a rite of passage.

He further notes:

The hunt is the ideal way to teach universal virtues, including generosity, patience, courage, fortitude and humility.

Others may not agree with that, but I am describing a true, honest and active culture in this country that is very important. Members opposite may laugh, but to many of us, and to me in particular, it is important.

I used to be the hunting columnist for the *Winnipeg Free Press*, and I remember interviewing a young man who had just taken his very first deer. In his own words to me, he said:

Even though it was just a doe, that deer was better than any fantasy I ever had, and it was even better because my dad was there with me every second and I could share my excitement with him...I could no longer understand how people could be against hunting since it was now something that was so dear to me and it is a passion that I can share with my dad and will share with my children when the time comes.

Government Orders

What happens as well is that people who hunt and have a relationship with wildlife and the land often take up careers in conservation, myself included. I caught my first fish when I was 4 and I got my first ruffed grouse when I was 14. I have had a wonderful 35-year career in conservation, and it started there. These experiences with my dad affected me profoundly.

• (1740)

There is a vast array of grassroots conservation activities in my own constituency. I went on at some length about hunting because without firearms we cannot have hunting, and the long gun registry is actually an attack on a culture and on an innocent, productive and wonderful way of life.

Bill C-19, the bill to get rid of the long gun registry, represents a real and tangible victory for those who cherish the particular way of life that I have described. It is a way of life that understands where our food comes from, reveres nature and values hard work and family traditions. Quite simply, this culture makes our country what it is.

Over and over again in the campaigns I have been in over the last year, my constituents have told me about how important the issue of the long gun registry is. In my constituency we have many issues that deal with agriculture, health care, rail service, and so on; however, the long gun registry came up as a particularly egregious affront to the innate country common sense that is represented by my constituents. The communities in my constituency have a very deep and profound relationship with the land. They are confident people who work hard and, as I said, value the fact that they play by the rules. Those are the people in this country whom we should be rewarding, people who work hard and play by the rules.

For me as an MP, those people are my top priority. Many of them are employed in the natural resources industries of farming, ranching, mining, energy production and so on. We know the importance of the natural resource industries and of our rural communities, and it can almost be said that the people who work and thrive in our natural resource industries are carrying the country. They, in effect, make our country what it is.

[Translation]

Mr. Pierre Jacob (Brome—Missisquoi, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how will the government respond to the honest, hard-working police chiefs, police officers and other front-line workers across this country, including youth protection workers, ambulance attendants, paramedics and nurses, in cities and in rural areas, who say that the registry is useful in the context of their duties or that it makes their work environment safer?

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I think my colleagues have gone a long way to answer that question, but I would like to quote the Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), the member for Beauce, who said very succinctly that it's very important to measure results, not intentions.

I will grant that the members opposite, in their desire to keep the long gun registry, have good intentions and actually care about public safety, but what counts is results. As one of my colleagues said, we have a number of police officers on this side of the House,

and to a person they say that the long gun registry is useless to them. All of us have had contact with police officers in the street and in their cars, and I make a point of asking them. I have not come across one front-line police officer who says the registry is of any use whatsoever.

• (1745)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is always difficult to have a discussion with people who think that what they are saying is right and true, and whatever anyone else says is wrong or is false. I will not fall for that ideology.

I have friends who are hunters. No one is attacking hunters. We are talking about protecting human life by ensuring that weapons are registered. We need licences to drive our cars. When people go hunting by boat, they need a licence. So it is only normal to have to have a licence for a firearm.

Now, what is even worse is that I can already hear the shredders. Not only are they going to scrap the firearms registry, but they also want to shred and destroy the registry. The people of Quebec want the registry. The Quebec government wants to have that information to create its own registry.

If the government respects people so much, why are the people of Quebec not entitled to respect so that Quebec can create its own registry? In the meantime, in spite of the Conservative cult, we will take care of our own affairs in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, as was noted earlier, every province is free to create their own long gun registry. However, in order to eliminate the long gun registry, which is nothing but information, the information itself has to go as well. If Quebec wants to spend millions on an ineffective long gun registry, I suppose that is its right.

I notice that the members opposite never present any real evidence about the registry actually affecting crime rates. My colleague from Fundy Royal made the point that if it were so incontrovertible that the registry worked, then I think people's views on this side might be different. There is not a shred of evidence that it works. We need results on crime control, not pious good intentions.

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member talked a lot about tradition in his riding.

In my riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, people participate in a variety of sports. We have farmers and many of them use long guns. Hunting is a way of life. I also have had a chance to visit of number of ranges in my riding where people are taught to respect firearms and to use them safely, not to be scared of them. I think there is a lot of fearmongering that we should be scared. That is one thing that will be taken away. One of the concerns that those people had was that we were intruding on their ability to teach their kids the responsible use of firearms, as well as to hunt and everything else.

Government Orders

Could the member comment on some of that tradition and why people feel so insulted by the existing law?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Mr. Speaker, I know that others do not see the connection between hunting and firearms. To me, it is pretty obvious. If we take away the tool that is needed to hunt, we actually kill hunting.

In terms of the member's comments about safety, there are three shotgun sports not related to hunting. There is trap shooting, skeet shooting and sporting clays. They have been practised for decades around the world and, because of the safe handling that my friend talked about, there has not been one accident in those sports despite the millions and millions of shotgun shells that have been fired. That is a testament to responsible firearm ownership.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start with some brief comments. The member for Nipissing—Timiskaming said that by passing the bill that is before us we will save \$2 billion. I would very much like to understand how he is going to save \$2 billion by scrapping the firearms registry. The money has already been spent and it will never come back. It is virtually an insult to tell Canadians they are going to save that much. What is going to be saved is \$4 million. Four million dollars a year to save lives; I think that is worth it. Honestly, I think Canadians deserve it. Four million dollars is not too much, even if it saves only a single life. The statistics tell us there has been a significant decline in deaths and attempted murders in spousal violence situations since the firearms registry was established. The registry is working; it is saving lives.

I cannot believe that the Conservatives really want to abolish our firearms registry. The Parliament of Canada should continue to do everything it can to protect the women of this country. It should do everything it can to protect gay people and members of cultural communities. We are all affected by violent people, by acts of aggression, by violence. We have had enough.

We have the tools in front of us that can protect us, that help us and that can save lives. At a cost of \$4 million a year, I honestly think it is worth it. The bill to abolish the registry today is a slap in the face to Quebecers. Quebecers who want the firearms registry are being told too bad, they will pay twice for the same registry. The Conservatives think that by abolishing it, they will save \$2 billion dollars. That makes no sense. Quebecers are being told tales. They are being told to believe that it is worthwhile to destroy it. But what is really being done is to make Quebecers pay twice for a firearms registry that cost an arm and a leg, as we know.

I want to hear that Parliament is going to continue to protect people who are disadvantaged, who are hurt, who are attacked, and that it certainly does not want to abolish the firearms registry. I want to keep this registry.

I would like us to remember how the firearms registry came about. My colleague reminded us that Heidi Rathjen was very much involved in the creation of the current registry. On the evening of December 6, 1989, there was a massacre at École Polytechnique in Montreal. I was there on the evening of December 6, 1989. Fourteen women were killed when Marc Lépine went to the Université de Montréal with the intention of killing feminists. After firing into the

air, he convinced all the men in the classroom to leave. Only the murderer, Lépine, and his victims remained in the classroom.

Nobody wanted to believe that the lives of these people were truly in danger, but today, we do believe it. Of the nine women he shot at in the classroom, he managed to kill six. He then went along the corridor to the cafeteria. He went to another classroom. He managed to kill 14 women in less than 20 minutes. I was there on the evening of December 6. I remember my colleagues' faces, the shock, the sadness, the anger. I remember my many colleagues, Montrealers, women, who made their way to the Polytechnique. I remember the vigil and the questions we were all asking: How? Why? What happened? Fourteen women are dead? Is it true?

• (1750)

Were they dead because one man felt emasculated? Since that day, everywhere in Canada, on December 6, women and all Canadians remember the acts of violence committed against women. We remember the massacre at the Polytechnique in Montreal. We remember Marc Lépine's anti-feminism. Let us remember the reason for the massacre. Marc Lépine wrote on the day of the massacre:

Know that I am committing suicide today...not for economic reasons...but rather for political reasons. I have decided to send feminists, who have done nothing but ruin my life, to their Maker—to the kingdom of the dead.

That event led to the creation of the registry we have today. Since then, there have been other massacres in Montreal. We remember Anastasia De Sousa who died from bullet wounds at Dawson College in downtown Montreal. We remember how shocked people were, and the laws that have since been passed to protect our students against men and women—especially men—who cannot help themselves and who commit acts of extreme violence. Our firearms registry is there to defend those students.

We remember Valery Fabrikant, who killed four professors at Concordia University on August 24, 1992. He was successful in killing the departmental head, Phoivos Ziogas, professors Matthew Douglas and Jaan Saber, and the professor and president of the teachers' union at Concordia University, Michael Hogben, a martyr of the union movement. Mr. Fabrikant killed those people. Why? Because he thought that they had not done enough for him.

• (1755)

[*English*]

Valery Fabrikant believed that he was being wronged by the university structure of Concordia University. He hounded the members of the staff. He tracked the members of faculty. He would stalk people at their homes and at their meetings. He would follow them in the halls and the corridors.

This man turned out to be armed and he turned out to be dangerous. If we had the registry in place at that point, I have no doubt that the police would have realized the risk all of those university professors were in.

Private Members' Business

He claimed that he was provoked. That was his defence. The man is now in jail and I hope he stays there for a very long time.

A memorial is now in place at the university commemorating that event. I want us to remember the union members who were shot dead by Valery Fabrikant and the fact that the registry may very well have helped.

[*Translation*]

Today, it is my moral duty to condemn the Harper government for what it intends to do to the firearms registry. Once again—

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I remind the member that he may not use the name of other hon. members in his speech.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry.

I have a moral obligation to denounce the Conservative government's decisions on the issue of the gun registry. Once again, this government is forcing a bill through without any debate. The Conservative government will surely break the record for the lack of debates in the House. Not only does the Conservative government seek to avoid compromise with the large part of the public that is very concerned, it seems to worry about things that, honestly, many people do not understand.

The government is removing the requirement to register non-restricted firearms. It is also fearmongering. It is clashing with a large part of the public and also with police, who are responsible for ensuring public safety. This government brags about wanting to make people safe and sending criminals to jail, yet they are depriving law enforcement authorities of a valuable tool.

As of September 30, 2011, the Canadian gun registry was used more than 17,000 times each day. In my riding, police in the Gaspé have said that they use the registry every day. Officers in the Sûreté du Québec consult the registry every time they respond to a situation.

• (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I am sorry, but I am going to have to interrupt the member. It being 6 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) recognize that the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure plays a vital role in the creation and protection of jobs, and that infrastructure is a strategic asset that supports vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities; (b) act immediately to counter the crisis of crumbling infrastructure and the very real risks it poses to the economy, security, and the quality of life of Canadians; (c) develop a legislative framework, with clear targets, to provide sustainable, predictable and long term infrastructure funding agreements with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, Inuit and Métis

communities; (d) cooperate with stakeholders to encourage the use of sustainable and innovative infrastructure design models, and to develop sustainable building codes that favour energy and water conservation and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, and take into account changing demographics and evolving rural-urban linkages; (e) index the Gas Tax Fund to economic and population growth and increase the existing gas tax transfer by one cent per litre, and consider other alternative funding mechanisms to ensure municipalities, large and small, have the long-term capacity to build and maintain public infrastructure; and (f) acknowledge its exclusive financial responsibility for, and immediately announce its intention to replace, the Champlain Bridge.

She said: Mr. Speaker, this is a very important moment for me and I appreciate your taking the time to read the whole motion en français.

It is with great enthusiasm that I present this motion on infrastructure, but let me first set the stage. Infrastructure has been part of our history. The railroad that goes from coast to coast is part of our history and our heritage. It has also been the backbone of our communities and our economy.

Modern Canada has built infrastructure keeping in mind the needs of the changing demographics and the needs for a modern economy. We have built highways. When our rivers were becoming polluted, we rose to the challenge and built water treatment facilities. We have built schools and community centres. All of that infrastructure is making our communities vibrant and prosperous. It enhances the quality of life of many Canadians. From coast to coast to coast, infrastructure of all kinds helps our communities prosper.

Over the years, the Government of Canada in partnership with the provinces and municipalities has invested to make sure that we have good infrastructure that responds to the needs of different communities.

In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s we saw the building of much of our modern infrastructure which we continue to use.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

I am someone who really likes to go biking. For several years, I have lived in Montreal and enjoyed biking. I have been noticing for a number of years that a lot of infrastructure is aging and is in a bad state. The current level of investment in our aging infrastructure network does not seem to be keeping pace with demand. It is certainly not meeting the demand in terms of highway infrastructure and, more specifically, bridges and overpasses, are being more heavily travelled.

[*English*]

I present this motion thinking of the future, thinking also that we have to change our way of building infrastructure. We must think of the challenges of the 21st century, the challenges presented by our environment and by our different commitments to communities to make sure that we have not only buildings, but also roads that respond to the needs of the community. We have to think also of the way we plan infrastructure to make sure that we have infrastructure that responds to and integrates itself in living environments.

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

Infrastructure is the foundation that supports our vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities. Building and maintaining infrastructure play a key role in creating and maintaining jobs. According to a professor from the École des hautes études commerciales in Montreal, infrastructure is a strategic asset that contributes to the Canadian economy.

And yet our infrastructure is collapsing and crumbling. We see this is happening. On September 30, 2006, a section of the Concorde overpass collapsed, taking the lives of five innocent victims and affecting their families and friends. This summer, part of the tunnel above the Ville-Marie highway in Montreal collapsed. Fortunately, there were no victims. In Toronto, a cement block from the Kipling bridge came crashing down on the Gardiner Expressway, in the middle of rush hour. These and many other incidents remind us that the public infrastructure of our cities is in a critical state. And I am not even talking about the infrastructure of our smaller Canadian communities.

According to a Léger Marketing poll conducted in August, nine out of ten people responded that they were worried about using Montreal's highways. Approximately one out of every five drivers avoids certain highways because they do not trust the highway infrastructure.

And what should one make of the lack of drinking water infrastructure in some communities when in 2010, 1,200 boil water warnings were issued in Canada?

Our aging infrastructure will cost us a lot if the Canadian Federation of Municipalities is to be believed. It will cost \$123 billion to maintain and restore our decaying highways, bridges, sewers and water treatment systems, not to mention other types of infrastructure. On top of that, an additional \$115 billion will be needed to build the infrastructure of tomorrow.

And yet what are we seeing? Over the next three years, a significant portion of the federal infrastructure funding programs will expire. Canadians, however, who use the bridges and overpasses every morning to get to work know all too well that the revitalization work on our infrastructure is just beginning. The tens of thousands of people who drive over the Champlain Bridge every day can attest to that. And just as the federal government's major investments in infrastructure are due to expire—investments that were also supposed to kickstart an economic recovery—another recession is looming in Canada.

Instead of demonstrating foresight and ensuring that the economy is running smoothly, this government is irresponsibly rushing to impose fiscal restraint on Canada. The government is making its departments prepare scenarios for budget cuts of up to 10%. Will cuts be made to federal assistance for infrastructure? Will these budget cuts result in the loss of skilled workers at the Department of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities?

It is in this context that my motion asks the government to recognize that the construction and maintenance of public infrastructure plays a vital role in the creation and protection of jobs, and that infrastructure is a strategic asset that supports vibrant, prosperous and sustainable communities. We are also asking the government

to take all necessary action to counter the crisis of crumbling infrastructure and the very real risks it poses to the economy, security and the quality of life of Canadians.

•(1810)

I truly hope that the federal government will be an active partner and work with our provincial, municipal and community partners throughout the country.

I am asking the government to develop a legislative framework, with clear targets, to provide sustainable, predictable and long-term infrastructure funding agreements with provinces, territories, municipalities, First Nations, Inuit and Métis communities.

In politics, we are not really used to taking the long view. We often only think as far as the next election. This legislative framework, in co-operation with the provinces and communities, would depoliticize infrastructure, an expression that I borrowed from the magazine *Les Affaires*. Instead of reacting, we should undertake long-term planning so that infrastructure projects will serve all communities that sorely need them.

The infrastructure deficit has built up over the span of 40 years. Agreements will have to be negotiated with our partners to make up for long-standing investment deficits and also to build the roads, bridges, sewers, treatment plants and other infrastructure that will ensure the prosperity, vitality and health of our children's communities and those of generations to come. Clearly, agreements on federal funding for infrastructure will have to extend beyond 2014, when 40% of federal investments will cease.

My motion also calls on the government to show vision and to negotiate building codes with our partners that will result in sustainable infrastructure. Infrastructure renewal could result in a proactive policy to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions by including, for example, plans for comfortable, affordable, reliable, non-polluting public transit. I am talking about infrastructure that promotes water and energy conservation. These green technologies could become an economic driver and be exported.

This infrastructure has to be funded with ever-smaller budgets. We know that gas tax revenues are going to go down by nearly 60% because of demographic changes and inflation over the next 20 years. I urge the government to consider indexing the gas tax to the changes in our population and increasing the gas tax transfer by one cent a litre in order to secure stable infrastructure funding for the long term. We have to consider alternative funding mechanisms to ensure that the municipalities, small or large, have the long-term capacity to build and maintain public infrastructure.

This motion was put on the order paper before the announcement about replacing the Champlain Bridge. I want to thank the government for answering my call. I would like to reiterate that the Champlain Bridge sees 60 million crossings and facilitates \$20 billion in international trade a year. What is the government's plan for public transit infrastructure? How will this be coordinated with the transit in the greater metropolitan area? This is why we need a national public transit strategy, as proposed by the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina?

Private Members' Business

• (1815)

The reason I have been speaking about the Champlain Bridge and infrastructure in Quebec is because I represent the people of LaSalle—Émard, a riding in the Montreal area, and my constituents, like many Montrealers, are suffering the consequences of the deterioration of our infrastructure. But I realize that public infrastructure is deteriorating all over Canada.

I urge all members of the House to vote in favour of the motion I moved on behalf of the people of LaSalle—Émard and all Canadians. It is time to get to work.

Together, let us build the future.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, since taking office, our government has made unprecedented infrastructure investment, such as the \$33 billion building Canada fund. We have increased the gas tax and created the economic action plan. If infrastructure work is so important for the NDP, could the hon. member explain why it always seems to oppose our Conservative actions?

She also mentioned indexing the gas tax. Will she first commit to supporting our legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent?

• (1820)

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the Conservative government is looking into ways to fund infrastructure on a long-term basis. What I said is that we are hoping that this investment will continue, if not increase, until 2014.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some of the most dynamic and wonderful developments that we have seen in the province of Manitoba have been projects like The Forks development, Portage Place, The Wellness Institute, the streets, roads and underpasses, and the highways being developed. This all happens because there is a sense of co-operation among different levels of government. The federal, provincial and municipal governments sit down, recognize there is a need to establish a pool of funds that will take care of infrastructure needs. It is estimated that Manitoba alone requires hundreds of millions of dollars.

To what degree does the member feel that it is the responsibility of the federal government to work hand in hand, not only to provide money but to provide leadership in ensuring that all the stakeholders are brought to the table to develop the vital infrastructure projects that must go forward in order to build communities and, in fact, our nation?

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for stressing a point that was very important in my presentation and for bringing it forward so eloquently. It is very important that we work as a partnership.

[Translation]

I have often heard here in the House that this is a provincial jurisdiction. We really must work together, since we all represent the same people. I think it is very important to have these partnerships so that we truly understand the needs of our constituents.

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate and compliment my colleague from LaSalle—Émard for a fantastic speech, outlining something that, for most people, is really boring. They do not think a lot about what happens when they turn on water and the importance of their life being safe while driving down highways.

Would the member underscore the importance of this as a life-saving issue, not just pretty things in a community but actual infrastructure that supports ordinary life and families living in our communities?

[Translation]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I love my colleague's passion when he talks about important things. These are basic needs. As I mentioned, we built important infrastructure over the years, but it has been neglected and abandoned. Now, we must identify these basic needs and make sure that our infrastructure is safe, whether we are talking about drinking water or waste water treatment. Words escape me.

[English]

Mr. Dan Albas (Okanagan—Coquihalla, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard for bringing the motion forward. The member for LaSalle—Émard raises an important subject that matters to all Canadians and one that is often taken for granted. I commend the member for raising this issue in her motion.

I believe that all members in this House recognize the importance of infrastructure. It was not so many years ago, in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla, that the community of Summerland was suffering from a serious water shortage. Water had to be diverted from a local stream to provide water for the residents but this threatened fish habitat. At one point, the mayor of Summerland was facing potential jail time. Not far away, Lake Okanagan was a floating bridge.

In order to comply with the federal Navigable Waters Protection Act, the bridge was required to rise to allow marine traffic passage below. The bridge was well over 50 years old and would fail, causing the bridge deck to get stuck in the up position, causing chaos. Ambulances and other emergency service vehicles could not get by.

Those are just a few examples of the problems created by decades of infrastructure neglect.

Fortunately, our government has taken strong action, which is why I am rising today to speak to the motion.

In budget 2007, it was our government that announced the seven-year \$33 billion building Canada plan, the first ever federal long-term plan for infrastructure. In fact, the building Canada plan is the single largest, most sustained federal government commitment to public infrastructure in Canadian history.

Private Members' Business

It did not end there. In budget 2009, in response to the economic recession, our government announced Canada's economic action plan. Through the economic action plan, our government worked in partnership with the provinces, territories and municipalities to deliver timely, targeted and temporary investments that created jobs and helped boost our economy. In fact, we invested in over 28,000 projects all across Canada and, in many cases, these projects upgraded and rebuilt infrastructure that had suffered from decades of neglect under former governments.

In my home province of British Columbia, we had a B.C. NDP government that promised to build a new bridge to replace that same 50-year-old lifting bridge across Okanagan Lake. However, it did not. Much as it also promised to upgrade Highway 97 and much as the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam told us yesterday, the B.C. NDP did not build the Evergreen Line first proposed in 1993.

What the member for New Westminster—Coquitlam did not mention was that our government, working in partnership with the provincial government, had already made a \$600 million commitment to that important project.

Another project in my home province of British Columbia that was not mentioned is the Canada Line transit project from the Vancouver airport in Richmond to downtown Vancouver. The project involved a \$450 million investment from the federal government. And, to be clear, the Canada Line is a P3, a public-private partnership. That is why the NDP and CUPE were opposed to the project.

However, today, the Canada Line is a huge success. Average ridership today exceeds 100,000 a people. This is well ahead of all the projections. This infrastructure project has been a huge success and that success has also involved the private sector.

In municipalities across the country, from the southern expansion of Edmonton's light rail transit system, to a wind turbine to provide clean, powerful waste water treatment in Kensington, Prince Edward Island, or, in my riding of Okanagan—Coquihalla, the partnership that resulted in the new Okanagan College Centre for Excellence. This building is one of the most environmentally innovative structures of its kind in North America.

The latter examples illustrate how these infrastructure investments are supporting the government's broader goals in relation to energy, water conservation, air quality and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

• (1825)

These are just some of the examples of the \$33 billion invested into important infrastructure projects across Canada. In fact, more than one-half of the building Canada plan, more than \$17 billion, is going directly to municipalities through the gas tax fund and the goods and services tax rebate. Those funds help build our infrastructure.

As members of the House I am sure are well aware, our government has recently tabled legislation to make the gas tax fund permanent, at \$2 billion per year, and the NDP stood in the House and voted against it. This will provide Canadian municipalities with significant, stable, predictable and sustainable funding for their infrastructure priorities. I know from my time as a city counsellor,

this is the type of funding that local governments need to carry out major infrastructure projects. This is why we now have 28,000 infrastructure projects all across Canada in which our government has invested. There has not been a government in Canada, for over 30 years, that even comes close to matching what our government has done since 2007.

The government recognizes the vital importance that modern, world-class public infrastructure plays in virtually all aspects of our lives. Ultimately, this is the reason why I am speaking against the motion. We must recognize with all of these 28,000 infrastructure projects, all have occurred without the added expense of more Ottawa-imposed bureaucracy, as would result from what is proposed in Motion No. 270.

Canadians do not want, nor need, more bureaucracy and red tape or legislative frameworks from Ottawa. What Canadians need is action and, more important, results. From coast to coast to coast, the results from the leadership of the government are clear: upgraded water systems; expanded sewer systems; new recreational facilities and walking paths; and in fact much more. From city to city we can see the results from our government's infrastructure program. There are 28,000 projects that speak to the success of the government's economic action plan. I view each one of these projects as cause to speak against this motion.

With regard to the motion's reference to the Champlain Bridge in Montreal, the government has always taken its responsibilities for this important infrastructure asset. In the past few budgets we have invested a total of \$380 million in the Champlain Bridge to maintain it and ensure its ongoing safety to the next decade. Then on October 5 this year, the Minister of Transport announced that our government would proceed with building a new bridge across the St. Lawrence River.

I would like to thank my colleagues for taking the time to hear my comments today. I would also like to thank the member for LaSalle—Émard for raising a very important issue. However, I believe this government's record for results and success in creating an unprecedented 28,000 infrastructure projects all across our great country speaks for itself and negates the need for any added Ottawa bureaucracy or administration, as Motion No. 270 contemplates.

• (1830)

[Translation]

Hon. Denis Coderre (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, to begin, I would like to congratulate you on reading the motion entirely in French. Bravo. If the position of Auditor General is still available, I am sure you would meet the bilingualism criterion. Congratulations, Mr. Speaker.

I listened to my NDP and Conservative friends speak. I have been here for 15 years and everyone naturally tries to take some credit: because of me, it was me, my government is better than yours, the mean provincial governments led by opposing parties, it is terrible. In reality, Canadians, Quebecers and people in Montreal, in my riding, need infrastructure renewal. That is the reality.

Private Members' Business

I could have said that in 1993, when the Liberals came to power and inherited a \$42 billion deficit from the Conservatives, we decided to invest heavily and create what is now known as the infrastructure program. I could have spoken about that, but I want to look to the future. I do not want to look to the past.

We have clearly always wanted investment in infrastructure. I think that in 2007, there was a minority government. Yes, that is right. A majority was needed, and the Conservative Party did not have enough elected members. So I imagine that all parliamentarians—at any rate, those in the Liberal Party—voted with the government because it was important to invest in infrastructure for the people.

However, this is 2011. We are now faced with a certain reality. Every time we have gone through a recession, infrastructure has been the basic economic building block, not only to improve people's quality of life, but also to create jobs. It is a vital partnership program. While respecting all jurisdictions, we must ensure that the Canadian government acts as a facilitator, taking the needs of municipalities and provincial control into account, and that it invests the money needed to meet the needs of Canadians.

We are in favour of this motion. Of course, we have been talking about the Champlain Bridge for quite some time. I have been talking about it for quite some time. We talked about it during the last election campaign. The announcement has finally come. I do not know who will cut the ribbon, but we need a new Champlain Bridge. In the meantime, along with the original announcement, we also definitely need to know what will happen to the existing bridge. The government has always refused to hand over the inspection reports. If you talk to engineers, read the studies and follow the news, you know that the bridge is in bad shape. When engineers tell me not to drive at the edge when crossing the Champlain Bridge, but rather to stay in the middle, that is serious. I would really like to believe that a bridge will be built within the next 10 years, but that means we have to continue using the existing bridge for nearly 10 years. We therefore need to have the straight goods on the condition of the bridge.

Clearly, we need to find a new way of doing things. As a Montrealer, I think the municipalities are the key to the future of this country. So we need to have a new partnership.

•(1835)

[*English*]

We need a new deal with municipalities, a deal that will have a balanced approach with the rural and the urban, a deal where we will be able to ensure that we have a true diversity for those who have a car, or for those who have a bicycle, or for public transit. Public transit does not just mean buses; it also means trains. We need a rail policy between the cities.

[*Translation*]

We can talk about HSR in the Quebec-Windsor corridor. We can talk about basic infrastructure, whether interprovincial or between Canada and the United States. But very definitely, infrastructure is the future. The basic policy of a government, both for the economy and for quality of life, depends on its infrastructure. We have to protect the existing infrastructure while ensuring that we are able to build more. And this motion meets that need well. What we like

about this motion is that it is all about diversity. It does not talk only about rural and urban, it also talks about aboriginal communities, the first nations, the Inuit and the Métis.

I am a former minister of sport. I remember that when we created the infrastructure program, there were three components. Component 3 was particularly important, to my mind, because it was a way of being able to invest in sports or recreation and tourism infrastructure. Infrastructure also serves as a prevention and development tool. An arena was built in Iqaluit, where there were young people with problems. The sports infrastructure improved the young people's self-esteem, with the result that people like Joé Juneau in Kuujjuaq are creating programs for youth. This infrastructure means that we can restore young people's dignity.

That is good both for the environment and for the quality of life in municipalities. It is an important development tool for our own people. We have a motion and we have a Conservative government. The member for LaSalle—Émard is going to be a bit disappointed, because she got a little handshake from the Conservative member opposite who said the blues were going to vote against it. But it is important that we keep talking about it. Yesterday, we talked with the member for Trinity—Spadina about her private member's bill on public transit.

Today, we are talking about infrastructure. At the transport committee, we are doing a study of a national public transit strategy. Except now, we can no longer separate a national public transit strategy from infrastructure. We have to have a strategy that includes both these aspects. In terms of governance and funding, it is essential that any public policy take both these aspects into account; one will not work without the other.

We agree with the funding measures. Mr. Martin, who was the prime minister at the time, is the one who first put forward, in cooperation with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the idea of putting a tax on gasoline that would be given to the municipalities for funding. The current government made this gas funding permanent. We must look at new funding methods. If the municipalities are telling us that this tax is no longer sufficient, we must find more money. If this money currently serves only to maintain existing infrastructure and we want to build more infrastructure, we will have to find money somewhere else.

We must look at indexing and see if we can find additional funds in the current gasoline excise tax. An additional tax does not mean an additional tax for the Canadian public. It means that we will take an additional amount and send it to the municipalities. We will no longer have any choice, and we all agree that such is the case.

First, a public-private partnership is imperative if we have smart regulations and the right type of support. It is not additional bureaucracy. Our role is to ensure that people have a decent quality of life and, as a result, it is up to us to provide the framework. Second, the Liberal Party has always advocated for a fund devoted to infrastructure. We therefore need an amount of money that is stable in the long term. Given the fragile state of the world economy and our fairly high level of debt, we must immediately start investing more in infrastructure. It is basic economics. Thus, we must set up a fund devoted to infrastructure.

Private Members' Business

• (1840)

And so, we will support this motion. This is an important debate. We do not agree with what the government has said. We recognize that investments have been made thanks to the efforts of all parliamentarians, but now we must move forward. We support the motion of the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard.

[English]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have a problem with municipal infrastructure. Our roads and bridges are crumbling, there is massive traffic gridlock, there are drinking water warnings, and thousands of people are on waiting lists for affordable housing.

Traffic gridlock costs Canadians billions of dollars. They spend almost 32 working days a year, that is more than a month, commuting to and from work because the public transit system is inadequate. The daily commute time in the largest urban centres of Montreal and the greater Toronto area is 75 minutes. That is the worst ranking among 23 global cities. That is a bad sign.

Then there is policing, and I would like members to consider this. Municipalities pay more than 60% of total policing costs, including \$600 million worth of downloaded federal policing duties, such as border security and international drug trafficking. In terms of municipal budgets, policing makes up more than 20% of local spending. In some communities, policing costs are rising faster than the costs of health care.

Then there is housing infrastructure. Across Canada, 175,000 families are on social housing waiting lists and more than 40,000 Canadians, including young children, are sleeping in emergency shelters every night, including tonight.

There is a problem in terms of municipal infrastructure. The deficit is in the billions of dollars and there is a shortfall. Why? It is because municipal budgets are really not set up to deal with all of these challenges. Eight cents of each dollar of tax goes to municipalities while the rest of it goes to provincial governments and the federal government. As far as municipalities are concerned, lots of money is being taken out of urban cities and small towns but very little is being put back in. The shortfall is severe. What is happening?

Without a share of the income and the sales tax generated by new growth, communities are being forced to raise property taxes and cut core services. Most often infrastructure repairs are put off. The resulting infrastructure deficit is bad for families, businesses and our economy.

There is a unique opportunity in front of us because the building Canada fund of \$1.2 billion per year expires in 2014. The affordable housing and homeless program of \$380 million per year expires in 2014. The police officer recruitment fund of \$80 million per year expires in 2014. The public transit capital trust of \$300 million per year that was set up through the Martin-Layton partnership expired in 2009. With about 40% of all of the infrastructure programs due to expire, there is a unique opportunity in front of the House to renew these commitments to municipalities.

There is also one more area that I did not talk about and that is rural, remote and northern communities. These communities account for more than 50% of Canada's exports, including energy, agriculture and natural resources. On average, however, the rural household income is \$10,000 less than other parts of the country.

• (1845)

The costs of adapting the roads, bridges and public buildings, because of the Arctic temperature rising, would more than double the north's estimated \$400 million infrastructure deficit. Northern communities too are in a desperate situation.

That is why we must look at the infrastructure funds and it is extremely important to have a legislative framework. Canada needs a national vision. We need to ask ourselves, what will our cities look like in five years time or 25 years time? We must look ahead to a vision of our cities because we know that 80% of Canadians are living in cities. We must set a national vision. That is why we must have a legislative framework.

We also need to include cities at the table when the federal government is talking to provincial and territorial governments, not just passing the buck, "Municipalities are not federal responsibilities". I heard that yesterday and I heard it a few minutes ago from my Conservative colleagues. I may hear it again in a few minutes when my Conservative colleague stands up, "Let us pass the buck. Municipalities are really not a federal responsibility".

If the Conservatives say they are not a federal responsibility, they should include them in the discussions with the provincial and territorial governments and ensure they have a seat at the table, but that is not what is happening.

That is why we need to have a legislative framework. We need to set clear targets. We need to ensure there is sustainable, predictable and long-term funding.

It has to be green. Canada has a building code. We cannot just say that it is up to the municipalities to decide on the building code or it is up to the cities to decide how they build. Actually, there is a Canada building code and we must ensure that the infrastructure that is being built meets state of the art building standards.

I was just in some northern communities and I saw a house being put up with very thin boards. This was a northern community. Firefighters are saying that if we build it in a way that is very thin, it is dangerous to firefighters. Other people are saying that if we build it in a way that is not energy sustainable, then we are losing all that heat during the winter and we are burning more and wasting money.

That is why we need to be innovative, have the best technologies, and ensure that any infrastructure that is being built would be built in the greenest way.

Private Members' Business

We need to ensure that it creates a lot of jobs because every billion dollars being spent on infrastructure creates 11,000 jobs. That is much better in my books than giving corporate tax cuts because corporate tax cuts certainly do not create thousands of jobs.

After all of these positive reasons and all the municipalities saying that they need to have a sustainable long-term plan, why would the Conservatives refuse to do so? Part of it is probably because they are out of touch with reality. They do not want to support a legislative framework because they do not want to be accountable.

Right now there is no clear funding formula on how money is allocated. It is a closed door decision. There is no paper trail in some instances. We saw that \$50 million gone to Muskoka. There is no accountability and no criteria.

It is, in fact, a lot easier to just dole out money to friends behind closed doors than saying that there is a legislative framework and there is a funding formula.

Where is the grading system? What percentage of the funding goes to state of good repair? We do not know what percentage goes to new projects. That is not clear at all. It is all about short-term funding arrangements and that is not acceptable.

•(1850)

That is why we need to index the gas tax. We need to increase the gas tax transfer by at least one cent so that we can create jobs now.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Resuming debate. I wish to inform the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities that I will have to interrupt his remarks at the top of the hour as this is the end of the time period.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise today to discuss the NDP motion, Motion No. 270.

Let me begin by saying that of the six points enunciated here, five are either statements of the obvious and which there is great consensus and no reason to debate, or statements of existing government policy and action.

One section, however, stands out as a glaring exception to the others. That is section (e). It says:

(e) index the Gas Tax Fund to economic and population growth and increase the existing gas tax transfer by one cent per litre, and consider other alternative funding mechanisms to ensure municipalities, large and small, have the long-term capacity to build and maintain public infrastructure;

The motion calls for an increase in the gas tax fund transfer to municipalities by one cent today and then, going forward, anywhere between 2% and 5%, depending on what the nominal GDP growth is. This is a massive, year after year increase in expenditures by the federal government.

The problem with that proposal is that nowhere in the motion does the New Democratic Party explain from where that money will come. We do not know its origins. So, we are left with only two options to explain how the NDP would finance such an increase.

One is through a real time increase in taxes, starting now; that is to say, the federal government would have to go out and find a tax to increase on Canadians so that it could pay for this massive and growing new expenditure that the motion would impose upon the Crown.

The most obvious tax that the NDP would have us raise is the gas tax itself. After all, the proposed spending increase is in the area of the gas tax fund and it logically follows that such an increase would, therefore, be paid for, by NDP logic, through an increase in the gas tax itself.

Now, that increase would not only raise the price of consumers fuelling their vehicles, it would also increase the cost of every transported good we can imagine: food, clothing, or any other retail item that is brought to us in a truck. This would leave Canada in a position of accelerating inflation at a time when the world could potentially face inflation problems as it is.

Let us keep in mind, and I remind the members of the NDP again, no government has money of its own. Only taxpayers have money. Every time politicians propose a spending increase, they are necessarily proposing to take more money from taxpayers in order to finance it. In other words, the government cannot give us anything without first taking it away. One way to do that would be an increase in the gas tax, but I am sure that our colleagues across the aisle would have numerous other suggestions on how they could take money from taxpayers to fund a proposal of this kind.

The second way that we could finance the proposal contained in Motion No. 270 is by borrowing more money. Members across the aisle might notice that there is a global recession that came to Canada from abroad but, due to its impacts, has left this nation, like almost every other nation in the developed world, in a deficit position. That means there are no surplus dollars sitting around or hidden beneath the cushion on the government couch from where we can take the money to pay for the proposal of increased spending that the NDP brings today. So, either the NDP is going to raise taxes or it is going to increase the deficit, which is a way of raising taxes, tomorrow.

•(1855)

Deficits are nothing more than deferred taxation. Of course they have to be repaid one day, when taxpayers are presented with the bill by the lender. Worse than that, not only would this bill force an increased deficit that we would be repaying in the future, but taxpayers at that point in time would also be stuck with a permanent and growing obligation, year after year, in program spending that they would have to meet above and beyond the repayment of the deficits incurred at the outset from this proposal.

As I said earlier, governments do not have money of their own. Winston Churchill once said that the idea that a nation can tax itself into prosperity is like a man standing inside a bucket and trying to lift himself off the ground by pulling on the handle. For obvious reasons, it does not work. Put differently, one economist once said that for people on the economic left, government is the grand fiction whereby everybody lives off of everybody else. Again, it is a mathematical impossibility.

Government Orders

When we look around the world at the devastating consequences of these types of socialist policies, constantly increasing spending, we see that nations are on the verge of default. They are writing down debt. There are people in the streets protesting the massive social services cutbacks that have been necessitated by the terrible financial positions of their governments and the devastating tax increases that are putting people out of work and families out of their homes. Those are the kinds of consequences that we, in this country, are successfully avoiding and will continue to work to avoid by enacting fiscally responsible policies that can be funded under the existing tax base without putting our next generation deep in debt. That is why I oppose this motion.

• (1900)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. parliamentary secretary will have three minutes remaining in his speech, if he so chooses, when the House next resumes debate on this motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to order made on Monday, October 24, 2011, the House shall now resolve itself into committee of the whole to consider Motion No. 7 under Government Business.

[*English*]

I do now leave the chair for the House to go into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

COPTIC CHRISTIANS IN EGYPT

(House in committee of the whole on Government Business No. 7, Mr. Bruce Stanton in the Chair)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we begin this evening's debate, I would like to remind hon. members of how the proceedings will unfold. Each member speaking will be allotted 10 minutes for debate, followed by 10 minutes for questions and comments.

[*Translation*]

The debate will end after four hours or when no member rises to speak.

[*English*]

Pursuant to the order adopted Monday, October 24, 2011, the Chair will receive no dilatory motions, no quorum calls and no requests for unanimous consent.

We will now begin tonight's take note debate, accordingly.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC) moved:

That this Committee take note of the ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and their institutions.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister and

Minister of Foreign Affairs could not participate in this debate because they are out of the country. However, this is a very important debate happening tonight.

It is my great pleasure to rise and speak on this issue. Over this year we saw tremendous excitement and hope as we saw the revolution unfold in Egypt, following the revolution in Tunisia, and subsequently moving to Libya and elsewhere, what is popularly known as the Arab Spring.

Watching the Arab Spring, there was a tremendous amount of hope and expectations. In fact the world was awed by what was taking place in the streets of Egypt. Most importantly, the world was impressed by the thousands of Egyptians who came looking for their own rights. They wanted democracy, freedom and their rights.

The world watched in great awe as this event was taking place. Subsequently, as we saw, the president of Egypt had to resign. Those who were rulers accepted the fact that the changes were taking place and that they had better address the wishes of the Egyptians.

What is even more impressive, more important, was that in the streets of Egypt, in Tahrir Square, there were Muslims, Coptic Christians, and all Egyptians standing in solidarity, working for their rights, and calling, "We are all Egyptians". That statement was made on the streets and brought a tremendous amount of hope and expectation to the international community that the new Egypt that was coming out would take care of its minority rights, as well, not only the rights of the majority of Egyptians, but all Egyptians, from whichever region.

This in itself was extremely impressive, and most Canadians held their breath and said there is a new dawn era coming down in Egypt. Of course there was a concern over a period of time that some violence had taken place against the minority in Egypt, which is the Coptic Christians, the burning of their churches and violence. We have also seen in other parts of the world, where minority rights have been trampled by the majority.

Egypt, by itself, has been a leader over the years in providing strong moral leadership in the African world, as well in the Arab world. Egypt's standing has been recognized around the world and respected.

But when a nation's rulers and law do not respect the rights of its minority, then the shine comes off. Of recent, we were horrified to see that shine come off, most specifically when the security forces fought with the Coptic Christians who were asking for their rights and over 27 people died.

We would like to express our deep condolences to the families who lost their loved ones in this unnecessary violence.

For a long time Canada has stood for human rights. The cornerstone of this government's policy is upholding human rights. We have taken our stand very strongly at the United Nations against Iran and against any other regime that we find is abusing the human rights of its own citizens.

This is one of the reasons the government had no problem joining the UN Security Council resolution on Libya, because it was there to protect the people of Libya.

Government Orders

• (1905)

The government's cornerstone policy being human rights, we have spoken and will continue to speak on the international stage about the human rights of citizens, most importantly of minority religious rights.

Recognizing this as being a very important cornerstone policy, the government said in the throne speech that it would open an office at the Department of Foreign Affairs to keep track of religious freedom. We have what we would call the office of religious freedom around the world to let our voice be known on the international stage whenever there is a violation of the human rights of minorities. In today's world, this is extremely important.

Today in Perth at the Commonwealth summit, the Prime Minister made a very strong statement to the Commonwealth that it should recognize human rights as one of the cornerstone policies of the Commonwealth Secretariat. Once human rights start to be taken away, it is very difficult to stop it and, without stopping it, the world would not be a better place to live.

It is up to Canada, it is our responsibility to stand up and speak to this in the international forum, as we do at the United Nations. Therefore, I am delighted that we are having this debate here in the House tonight to express our deep concern for the events that have taken place in Egypt following the violence against the Coptic Christians.

As members know, Coptic Christians have been living in Egypt since the 5th century. They are not new immigrants. They are part and parcel of the country, culturally, religiously, and in all aspects. They are Egyptians, pure and simple. Therefore, it is with great sadness that we see even the security forces take action against the people of Egypt, those whom they are supposed to defend no matter what religion.

The Government of Canada, in today's motion, has stated very clearly that it is extremely concerned. We call upon the Egyptian government to bring justice and for those who have attacked and broken the law, that they bear the full weight of the law.

There is no point in having laws to protect religious minorities when a blind eye is turned to extremists breaking the law. There is no point in having the laws because they do not give the confidence that is required. The government of Egypt must take very strong action against these individuals who have committed these horrendous crimes against the minority. This is one of the key elements in what the Government of Canada is calling upon the Egyptian government to do, and hopefully it will.

Egypt is now on a new path to a new constitution and parliamentary elections. This is the time for Egypt to put its stamp on the world and to say that it is a democracy that respects human rights and the religious freedom of everyone.

We will also look to the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to conduct an open and transparent investigation into the plight of the Egyptian Copts and to make its report public. This would show the world community the sincerity of the Egyptian leaders in addressing human rights issues in their country.

• (1910)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I heard the comments of my colleague with great interest. He talked about what is going to be done, or what maybe has been done. I am going to ask and answer some questions for him.

There is a question that was put at the external affairs committee on Tuesday. The question, which was with respect to the persecution of the Coptic community, was around what has Canada done at the United Nations. The member said, "It seems to me that the United Nations is essential in providing some investigation and some sanction, not the terms of traditional sanctions, but some ability to draw the international community and our allies in the region together to express in a concerted way the concern of the international community".

The answer came from a department official, who said, "Thank you for that question. I'll ask Marie if she's in a position to respond with respect to the UN. I don't know".

Mrs. Marie Gervais-Vidricaire replied, "I am not aware...".

We passed the motion last Monday. There was unanimous consent. The minister stood there and made the motion stronger, and to this date nothing has been done at the United Nations.

My colleague spoke about the UNHCR. It was the same question again about the UNHCR, in the same place.

Mrs. Barbara Martin answered, "This issue, in terms of the UN context, would normally come up in the environment of the UN Human Rights Council, which normally meets in the spring. Jeff, do you know if it came up in the last session of the Human Rights Council?"

Jeffrey McLaren, director of Gulf and Maghreb relations for the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, said, "I do not believe that it did in the last session. Every few years each country comes up for an intense review of its human rights. I do not believe Egypt has been on the schedule this year".

There were human tragedies in Egypt in 2000, 2008, 2009 and 2011, the last three of them under the—

• (1915)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. As a reminder to the member, we are in questions and comments. There will be other questions, so when there are many members who want to put questions and comments, I would ask members to keep it to about a minute or a minute and a half. The person who last spoke will respond for about the same time.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I want my colleague to know that I am giving him the full context and the full history.

The government, for the last four or five years, has done absolutely nothing. It has not brought up the request from the community to go in front of the United Nations Human Rights Council. The motion could be not explicit.

Government Orders

My question, through you, Mr. Chair, is to the parliamentary secretary. What is the government waiting for? You had your marching orders. Why are you not marching? As a matter of fact, you gave the marching orders to yourself. Why are you not marching?

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I remind members to direct their comments and questions through the Chair.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, I would like to remind the member that there is a process of how these things happen. Of course, he has not been involved in foreign affairs, so he would not understand the process. The Minister of Foreign Affairs at the United Nations, during his speech at the UN General Assembly—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I ought to know what I have been involved in or not been involved in, and those remarks from the member are not appreciated.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: That is more a matter of debate.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, this matter is very important. This is about human rights and about issues, so I do not want to debate on this. As I said in my speech, Canada has expressed its concern. The Minister of Foreign Affairs stated at the UN that we will continue working with our allies, but we will also continue working on the international stage and we will be speaking very strongly about human rights. That is what this government promises.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Chair, I share many of the concerns of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I too am very concerned about the situation and how it is evolving. Things are not getting better; they are getting worse.

Having travelled to Cairo myself and having spent some time in the Coptic community and having been very welcomed, I am particularly concerned about friends that I have there. It is a truly wonderful community. At the same time, I felt hope with the changes in Egypt, as well as great disappointment when the situation got worse. I agree with the parliamentary secretary that it is a characteristic of any modern democracy that one of its litmus tests is how it treats its minorities, whether they be linguistic, ethnic or religious.

I am sure our government has been in touch with certain powers in Egypt and I would like to know, very specifically, what the government is doing in its communications with representatives of that military government in order to push this issue forward and keep further massacres from occurring.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, when the Minister of Foreign Affairs brings his concern to the UN General Assembly and makes a public statement, it is a very strong public statement issued by this government to the Government of Egypt to say it is concerned. Having said that, we are in constant communication with the Government of Egypt and have expressed our strongest concern on this issue.

The debate tonight, and all the things I have just said, are a message to the Government of Egypt that there is an expectation from the international community for it to uphold human rights, and if it does not, then there are values that we just talked about which will come out, but we hope and understand that as the Government of Egypt moves forward it has said it will do it. We will wait and see if it has done it. If it has not, then it will have to answer first to its own people, second to the minority in its own country, and third to the international community.

•(1920)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Chair, I was in the foreign affairs committee meeting the other day when the member for Scarborough—Agincourt blustered in for 10 minutes, made his statements and blustered out. He did reference, in his question to the parliamentary secretary, issues that took place in Egypt in 2000.

The member for Scarborough—Agincourt was in a majority government at that time, yet nothing took place to address the problem.

I wonder if the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs could speak to the House about how these issues and incidents in Egypt have pushed our government—

Mr. Karygiannis: To do nothing, absolutely nothing.

Ms. Lois Brown: —to put forward an office of religious freedoms and what impact these issues are having on the creation of this office.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: Mr. Chair, this is a very crucial debate about human rights. I think the member on the other side should give respect to others. We all are concerned about this issue. That is the key thing, instead of trying to play partisan politics here.

Mr. Karygiannis: And you have done absolutely nothing.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: This is not about partisan politics. It is about the human rights of a community that is facing threats.

Mr. Karygiannis: Which you know nothing about.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: That is the key element, and I can assure the member when she is talking about it that this government is going to stand up. We are opening the office of religious freedom. It was not his government but our government that did that.

Mr. Karygiannis: Three massacres, and you have done absolutely nothing. You have not even taken it to the United Nations.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai: We have stood up in the international community and have spoken about it. When we talk about an issue as important as human rights and see this blustering coming from the other side, stopping the debate, it does not do justice to this Parliament.

Government Orders

Let us talk about the issue so that we can send a message to the Government of Egypt that parliamentarians of this country are seriously concerned. As parliamentarians in this country, we are all standing in Parliament speaking about it. That is why there is unanimous consent for the motion: because all parliamentarians are concerned about this issue in Egypt and want to send a message to the Government and the people of Egypt that what Canadians expect out of this revolution is the upholding of human rights for minorities. That is the key message we need to send tonight.

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Before we go to resuming debate, I would just remind hon. members that the rules for a take note debate certainly allow a little more informality in the chamber, and members are welcome to sit in seats a little closer if they wish. Members do not have to be in their usual seats to be recognized to participate in the take note debate.

I invite members to do as they wish, as they do not have to be quite so far apart. It often improves the nature of the debate as well.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Newton—North Delta.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, the NDP very strongly supports the debate we are having today. As Canadians, members of all political parties are very concerned about what is happening in Egypt. Because we had that presentation from the Coptic community to the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, we saw that it was very timely and really critical that we debate this as Canadians. It does not matter which political party we belong to; we absolutely value our fundamental belief in freedom to practise our religion and our belief in democratic structures.

In that light, we stand strongly with our brothers and sisters in the Coptic community as they face persecution and attacks in Egypt.

We are very concerned about the ongoing violence and the role that the military has played in that violence. We are demanding an independent investigation into the role of the military in the killing of protesters on October 9.

My colleague across the way gave a very eloquent history of the Coptic affiliation with Egypt: how they were there 600 years before the Muslim community arrived, how they make up 8% to 10% of the population of Egypt and how they are the second-largest religious group in that area. As such and as residents of Egypt, whether they have been there for a long time or whether they have just arrived, in a free democratic society they deserve to have the freedom to practise their religion without any persecution. It is absolutely imperative that we get that on record.

We will continue to support democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people. I want to remind people that when there was a rising against Mubarak's rule in Egypt, Coptic Christians and Muslims stood side by side in saying that it was time to fight for democracy, an ongoing democracy. They stood side by side. Even though today in Egypt some clerics may be inciting violence and asking people to defend the military, we also know that there are Muslim clerics who are standing with their brothers and sisters, the Coptic Christians, and saying this is not acceptable in the Egypt of today.

It is very clear to me that a solution rests within Egypt, and that is where solutions are often best found. However, Egypt needs some assistance during this time, and as Canadians we have a proud history and lots of expertise in helping with constitutions. As Egyptians move forward toward their elections and their constitution, we need to make sure that enshrined in that constitution is protection for minority groups and for those of different religions. Religious freedom has to be protected; it is imperative for that principle to be there.

To ensure that occurs, we also have to ensure that all the different groups play a real part as a constitution is constructed. Then we move into the electoral process, but women must also be fully included in that political process so that we have a real democracy in its full terms. I am not hearing any argument from the other side on this one.

We want the Government of Canada to establish a non-partisan democracy agency. It promised to do so in 2008, because Conservatives support democracy around the world as well. If we do that, having such an agency would be of real assistance as we face challenges like this.

●(1925)

The Prime Minister made that announcement in 2008 and no action has been taken on it yet. It is time for us to take some strong steps on that.

With regard to Canada's aid to Egypt, Canada is known for the nation building, humanitarian work and developmental work it does around the globe. Right now our work in Egypt is focused on economic development. In light of the political developments and the persecution taking place, it is time for us to redirect and refocus our aid so we are there to promote democracy and build the kind of civil society that is not just tolerant but accepting and inclusive of different religions and ethnic minority groups. Without that, it would be very difficult for a democracy to be established and survive. That will be very critical during the next phase. We have to pay special attention to that.

What we want are very simple things. I am hoping there will be agreement on this from all parties in the House. We want the protection of human rights and fundamental liberties, including religious freedom for all Egyptians. We want an independent investigation into the role of the military in the killings of the protesters. This investigation should be conducted by independent judicial authorities and not by the military itself.

We call for a free and fair electoral process in the upcoming parliamentary elections. We want the Canadian government to continue to urge the Egyptian government to overturn a ban on international election monitors. It is important that Canada and other nations have a very strong presence during the next electoral period. Without it, there will be a lot of dissatisfaction.

Government Orders

Another concern is that during this transitional period Egyptian women have largely been excluded from high-level constitutional talks. There are those who think that women cannot possibly participate, but let me assure everyone that women have a lot to offer. Any constitution that is put together with the full input of women will address a lot of the problems in society today. We would like the Canadian government to urge Egypt to ensure that women are equal participants in the democratic development process. After all, we have that commitment under UN Resolution 1325 and we are obligated to it.

We want the Government of Canada to establish the non-partisan democracy promotion agency, as it promised to do in its 2008 throne speech. I know the Prime Minister is committed to doing that, but he became busy doing things. I am sure when he returns from his trip he will give it his full attention.

We also heard recently about a new office of religious freedom. We do not need more new offices of religious freedom. That would be best addressed through our foreign policy.

The reports we are hearing about Egypt are not just stories being told to us by our Coptic brothers and sisters. Human Rights Watch is very concerned about what is happening in Egypt and the role the military has started to play. It has seen evidence of excessive force. Recently, Human Rights Watch wrote:

The only hope for justice for the victims is an independent, civilian-led investigation that the army fully co-operates with and cannot control and that leads to the prosecution of those responsible.

It is not just us saying there should be an independent investigation; Human Rights Watch is saying the same thing.

•(1930)

It is very easy to put people in silos, but I want to emphasize that there are Muslims in Egypt who are speaking out and standing up with their brothers and sisters in the Coptic community. We want to foster that civil society so that the solutions can be found in Egypt for Egyptians with freedom for one and all, with everyone included.

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, the subject we are discussing today is very dear to my heart. I will try to speak as quickly as possible to say everything in the minute or minute and a half that I am allotted.

As a Greek Orthodox Christian, I sense the pain of the Coptic Orthodox people all over the world with the tragedy of what is happening in Egypt. The Coptic Orthodox Church can trace its roots back to our Lord Jesus Christ. In fact a couple of years ago when I visited Egypt, I went to Old Cairo. I visited a historic church in which Jesus Christ himself was hidden by our Virgin Mary in the basement of what is now a church that had been built above where he was kept. It was a very emotional, historic time, and a very important symbol of Christianity right there in the heart of Egypt.

I want to refer to what our government has done and is doing. We all know the position our Minister of Foreign Affairs has taken. I want to ask the member opposite a question specifically as it relates to the office of religious freedom.

The first meeting was held with over 100 religious leaders right here in the nation's capital on October 3 of this year. This office was initially allotted a \$5 million budget. We have religious freedom in

Canada and it is really to promote religious freedom in other nations, like Egypt, regarding this very problem. That office has been put under the auspices of the foreign affairs ministry. That in itself says a lot. Can the member see the merit in that?

•(1935)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Chair, we have a very robust foreign policy. We are very active internationally. We have religious freedom right here in Canada, and we value that greatly.

I am not sure spending \$5 million on another office would actually get us where we need to go. I would like to see those resources put toward a non-partisan agency that would promote democracy.

The NDP and I are very committed to religious freedom. There is no magic agency that is going to fix this.

As we fight for religious freedom, it is an integral part of what we mean by democracy, what we mean by inclusion. It is integrated with not only the historical context but the current context and where we are going in the future.

I would like to see it left as part of the foreign affairs policy division. Let us now focus our energy on supporting in Egypt and other countries around the world civil society to build a strong allegiance to democratic society. Only when there is a truly democratic society that values freedom of minority groups, that values ethnicity, that values religious freedom can we say that there is a democracy.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I thought the hon. member's speech was excellent. I appreciate and agree with much of what she said.

One of the generic problems with majorities that persecute minorities is that they spend a whole whack of energy persecuting the minorities. As a consequence, the minorities end up leaving the country, taking their talents and wealth with them, or it ends up in a low-grade civil war, and sometimes it is not such a low-grade civil war, or it ends up in acts of terrorism. It is all because the majority does not see fit to accept either the religious or ethnic beliefs of the minority.

Does the hon. member see that in this instance Egypt may well cease to prosper and enjoy its rightful status as a leader in the community of nations, if it persecutes particularly 10% of its population and does not let them fully participate in society?

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Chair, there is no doubt in my mind that democracy suffers when the tyranny of the majority persecutes the minority.

I have lived in a minority setting from the age of 10, for most of my life, both in my ethnicity and religious background. I come from a family where almost every religion seems to have been practised over the years through different marriages and different directions. As I look at my children and grandchildren, I want them to grow up in a country that values diversity and not only tolerates, but absolutely accepts and celebrates different religions.

Government Orders

I think Egypt has to receive a very strong message, especially with the assistance it is receiving from Canada and other countries. We have to support Egyptians to find solutions that will suit Egypt. We have to nurture the kind of civil society groups that will lead them down a path of inclusivity rather than persecution.

• (1940)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Chair, I thank my colleague for his very interesting speech. I think that everyone in the House denounces the violence going on in Egypt.

I would like my colleague to confirm whether I understood correctly: there could be two very important steps.

First would be to have an independent investigation so we can truly understand what happened there. I would like to know how Canada could specifically collaborate on creating an independent investigation.

I would also like to get back to the idea of a non-partisan democracy promotion agency that could, once the investigation is complete, provide concrete support over the medium and long term as Egyptians work to develop a democracy that would respect all minorities, as well as the status of women, of course.

[*English*]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Chair, one of the key things to look at for the protection of minorities is the constitution. Canada can play a role as can other nations as their constitution is written and things are put in place. We have a further role to play in helping Egypt rebuild. We should focus our resources on supporting civil society groups that will take the building of a democratic state forward in a positive way. I absolutely believe the will is there in Egypt.

When Mubarak was there, the Coptic Christians and Muslims stood side by side. They stood side by side right after. Maybe it is a case of the military having been there too long. The transition is taking a long time.

Right now there are groups within Egypt that are very upset by the persecution and attacks on the Coptic community. It is our responsibility as the outside world to speak in support of civil society groups to take on those issues. We do that by building capacity in Egypt. We do that by building capacity in women. We do that by building capacity in different ethnic groups.

When we are talking about our Coptic brothers and sisters, we are talking about a highly educated group of people: doctors, lawyers, nurses. We are not talking about people with a low level of literacy. They are very well educated and have run many institutions. Here in Canada they play a valuable role in our communities.

I believe the solution is there, but we have to put on some pressure. Our CIDA funding is one way to do it.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Mount Royal.

People are watching this debate in the gallery and around the world. They are looking to us to give one clear message to Egypt, and that is the international community will not tolerate this anymore and that the Government of Canada will act not tomorrow, not 10 days from now, not next year or after the next massacre but immediately.

There has been massacre after massacre, whether it be the killing of the people in Nag Hammadi when they were coming out of a church, or the blowing up of the church on Christmas Eve last year, or when the army in armoured vehicles ran people over, people who were demonstrating, looking for justice, human rights and religious freedom. Yet Egypt has told the world it really does not care what other countries are saying time after time, be it under the old regime or the current one.

The international community has to tell Egypt that enough is enough and it will not tolerate it anymore. There are places that we can do it. There is the auspices of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, the Hague, all kinds of international courses that we could take and Canada must be at the forefront.

We passed a motion. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was the person who actually strengthened the motion even more. That was almost two weeks ago. Yet to this very day, nothing has been done. To this very day, the Prime Minister has not picked up the phone to call Ban Ki-moon or to tell the United Nations that Canada is not pleased. We have not sent a message with our ambassador asking for an emergency debate. We have not sent a message to the UNHCR asking for an emergency debate. We are scared to do it maybe because we have no clout at the United Nations or we are scared of the UN.

A good friend of mine, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, said the government does not want to do that because we know who controls the United Nations. Whether it works or not, it is up to us. If it does not work, then we will have to find other avenues to address it. The United Nations right now is the avenue where this should be addressed.

The government has a moral duty to the Coptic Christian community of Canada to act. It has a moral duty to take steps. At the end of the night, when all is said and done, I will have probably not even heard if something concrete to this day has been done. We cannot wait any longer. We cannot afford for one more single person to be killed, be it Copt or non-Copt, be it in Egypt or anywhere else. The perpetrators who use extreme violence, beat people, run people over, bomb people or machine gun them down must be held accountable. They must pay the full weight of the law. There is no country in the world that will give guns to their citizens to shoot people. Everybody says that cannot be done.

Government Orders

Everybody says that they have religious freedom. Even in the constitution of Egypt, article 1 says that there is religious freedom. Article 2 says it is all Sharia law and that takes precedence. If people want to build a church in Egypt, they have to get permission. If they want to renovate a church, they have to get permission. If someone wants to be a member of parliament in Egypt, God help that person. There are only two who are Copts. If someone wants to run for office, God help that individual. If a person says he or she believes in Jesus Christ and the other person does not believe in the same thing, the one who said it will get beaten up.

I would leave this message for my hon. colleagues across the way. Members and the government cannot afford to wait one more day. Measures have to be taken. Tomorrow morning the Prime Minister has to send a clear message with our United Nations ambassador to call an urgent meeting on this matter, to talk about it and ensure that the Egyptians, as well as the others perpetrating these acts on citizens, know that we will not tolerate it anymore.

• (1945)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: I would remind hon. members that we have a five minute question and comment period on this when it is a split time. In the last round, we were a little long on questions and comments. Therefore, try to keep them to one minute question and one minute response and then we can get more in for the hon. member.

Questions and comments, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, the member is right. The persecution of the Coptic people has been going on for many years in Egypt. We have spoken out about it for several years now. I know he was a member of a government for 13 years.

Could he explain, in some detail, how many times he brought this up to the minister of foreign affairs of his government and what exactly did that minister of foreign affairs and that government do with respect to the plight of Coptic people in Egypt? Perhaps if the Liberals had done something then, we would not be here tonight debating this.

• (1950)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, in 2003 I had an opportunity to visit Egypt. When I came back, I spoke to our minister of foreign affairs and relayed the information to him. However, since 2006, since Conservatives have formed government, there have been three massacres.

We are here tonight debating after three. Guess what folks, “three strikes and you’re out”.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, I have a really simple question for my colleague. I know he has a lot of passion about this. What are his thoughts on the office of religious freedom?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, if we say we want an office and if it is to work, we need to give the office muscle and \$5 million is certainly not muscle. The \$5 million would probably just cover the salaries of the people who would sit there writing reports and probably their trips once a year. It is absolutely nothing.

If we want to give this thing teeth, we should tie it in to ensuring that these people not only investigate, that they are not only there, that it is not only an office that makes paperwork, but that the office gets in touch with the communities, not only during the election but throughout the whole year. That would be my advice for the government.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to pose a question related to the member's reference to the impotence of the government to effectively be able to deal with this.

The member referenced the United Nations. If Canada had a seat at the United Nations Security Council, which we do not because Canada squandered its international reputation and its position among nations for the last several years, we could have made a difference. However, we lost a wonderful opportunity to make that difference in this world.

Canada had a seat at the United Nations Security Council, which the current government lost. If we did have that seat, would Canada be able to make a more effective contribution to the solution to the tyranny that is being imposed on the Coptic Christians?

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, in a very long time in the history of the United Nations, Canada does not have a seat at the United Nations inner office if I can call it such. This is the fault of the government. The government lost the seat and it went to Portugal, a country that is virtually about to go bankrupt. The Conservative government does not care and has absolutely no passion.

If we had a seat, we would have been able to call an emergency debate. If we had the seat, we would have been able to do something faster. We do not have it. We were not there because the government let it lapse and it did not do everything it could in order to get that seat.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to set the record straight and read from an address by the hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs to the United Nations General Assembly on Monday, September 26, 2011, where he said:

As citizens of the global community, we have a solemn duty to defend the vulnerable, to challenge the aggressor, to protect and promote human rights and human dignity, at home and abroad:

Women, Christians, Bahá'í and other victims of persecution in Iran.

Roman Catholics priests and other Christian clergy, and their laity, driven to worship underground in China.

Christians being driven out of Iraq by Al Qaeda—

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. We have to give the hon. member time to respond.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis: Mr. Chair, the parliamentary secretary can get up and read all the speeches she wants, mention all the names she wants and say what the minister has said. However, the facts speak for themselves. This motion was adjusted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs. He stood and said that I did not know what I was talking about. That was a week and a half ago.

Government Orders

When officials came to the foreign affairs committee meeting, the question was put them simply. They were asked if the government had done anything. The answer was "I'm not aware". That is the real answer. That is where it is. The government has done nothing—

• (1955)

The Assistant Deputy Chair: Order, please. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Mount Royal.

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to share my time with the hon. member for Scarborough—Agincourt. I commend him for both his advocacy and passion in support of this compelling case and cause.

I am pleased to support the motion which states:

That this House stand in solidarity with those religious minorities around the world and strongly condemn the vicious attacks on Egyptian Coptic Christians and their institutions; call on the Egyptian Government to ensure that the perpetrators of the attacks be brought to justice and bear the full weight of the law; and, ask the United Nations Human Rights Commission to conduct an open and transparent investigation into the plight of Egyptian Coptic Christians and issue a public report on its findings.

While we speak and stand in solidarity with religious minorities around the world, a shocking case of religious persecution and discrimination has been passing under the radar screen. What makes it so shocking is not only the extent of the persecution and discrimination but that it goes largely unacknowledged and unaddressed. I am speaking of the fact that approximately 165,000 people are killed each year simply because they are Christian. In total some 200 million Christians worldwide live with the constant threat of persecution, threats, physical abuse, torture and death solely because of their faith. I would be remiss this evening if I did not highlight this unspoken tragedy.

I will turn now to the *raison d'être* of this take note debate which is contextualized by the persecution of Christians, to which I have just referred, and addresses the specific pain and plight of the Coptic Christians in Egypt, which is a standing blight on the Arab spring.

Who can forget the Tahrir Square revolution, the struggle of the Egyptian people for freedom, democracy and human dignity, which is one of the most inspiring moments of the Arab spring.

Who can forget Wael Ghonim, the young Egyptian expert in social media who ignited the people's revolution? Who can forget that Muslims and Christians stood together in a common cause? Who can forget the young men and women who joined together in the struggle for equality? Who can forget the moving calls for social and economic justice? Who can forget the calls for an end to state sanctioned censorship and the call for an open and free media? Who can forget the calls for an end to the culture of impunity and that the perpetrators be brought to justice?

Simply put, who can forget the call for a plural democracy, constitutional reform, civilian control of the military, the repeal of the emergency laws, and the hope that the army would be the guarantor of the democratic transition that would oversee the birth of a democratic constitution whereby every Egyptian would be equal before the law and enjoy equal protection and equal treatment under the law?

It is often said that the test of a just society and democratic policy is how that state treats its minorities. In that sense, the Coptic

Christian community is a test case of Egyptian justice and that justice is wanting.

The history of violence against the Coptic Christian minority is not new. It began to accelerate in the 1990s when from 1992 to 1998 alone Islamic extremists murdered some 127 Copts. In 2000, a massacre left 21 Copts dead. If we fast forward to May 2010, Copts were the standing targets of angry assaults. On January 1, 2011, a bomb was detonated in front of a Coptic Church in Alexandria in the worst violence seen in a decade, killing 23 people and injuring over 100. I have only mentioned some of the sustained attacks.

While the anti-Mubarak demonstrations in Tahrir Square manifested sectarian co-operation whereby Muslims and Christians protected each other from police violence and government thuggery, the Coptic community soon found itself targeted by Muslim extremists who were angered by the building and repairing of churches and the simple acts of religious belief and expression. That exploded into violence on October 9 when a group of Christians organizing a peaceful protest against a recent assault on a Coptic church found themselves assaulted by those obliged to protect them, the Egyptian military, which resulted in 25 killed and over 300 injured.

Who can forget the YouTube videos showing armoured military vehicles driving at high speeds through crowds and into innocent Christian protesters? Who can forget Egyptian TV calling for "honest" Egyptians to rush to the defence of the military, not to the defence of the Copts? The broadcast said that the military was under siege from the unarmed Copts, a scurrilous accusation that incited vigilante attacks against the Coptic protesters who were fleeing from the military vehicles and army bullets.

• (2000)

The Egyptian military asked the government to investigate the violence, stating that all legal measures would be taken against those who organized, incited or participated in the violence. To date, no one has been held accountable.

In the question and answer period, I will set forth some recommendations as to what needs to be done.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I know the hon. member cares deeply about human rights. He is an impassioned supporter of human rights around the world.

He took us through a litany of terrible events that happened to the Coptic people in Egypt over many years. He mentioned one specific incident in 2000, in which I think he said over 20 Copts were killed.

As the hon. member was a minister of the government at that time, could he tell the House what his government did? Did it ask the UN for an investigation into that event? What did it do to ensure that these kinds of events did not continue to go on in Egypt?

Government Orders

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, in the year 2000, I was not a minister of justice. In the year 2004, when I was minister of justice, I paid an official visit to Egypt and in my official capacity as minister of justice and attorney general I brought up the plight of the Copts. I brought it up again when I revisited Egypt in 2005. I have brought it up almost every visit since, and I have made about 15 visits to Egypt.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Chair, Human Rights Watch is concerned with the Egyptian military's intention to control the investigation into its use of force against unarmed Coptic Christians as that amounts to simply a cover-up.

On October 25, Human Right Watch said that the Supreme Council of Armed Forces should transfer the investigation from military prosecution to a fully independent and impartial investigation into the killing of unarmed protesters by military forces.

The NDP believes there should be an independent investigation into the role of the military in the killings of the protesters. This investigation should be conducted by independent judicial authorities and not by military prosecutors.

What does the hon. member think of this?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, I have read the Human Rights Watch report. I support and endorse the fact that the government should conduct an independent, open, transparent, accountable inquiry wherein the perpetrators would be brought to justice. However, there are other initiatives we need to take.

The Canadian government must first call upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to enter into an emergency session to inquire into and report on the plight of the Coptic community. The United Nations special rapporteur into religious intolerance should also be called upon to look into this matter. The Geneva-based NGO community should make this a priority in its representations to the United Nations Human Rights Council. Finally, the Parliamentary Forum of the Community of Democracies should make it a priority on its agenda.

In effect, I end where I began, that is the promise of the Tahrir spring, the promise of equal justice, the promise of democratic polity, the promise of a constitutional democracy. All this will be tested by how Egyptian justice treats its Coptic Christian minority.

Therefore, whether we will have an Egyptian Arab spring or whether regrettably and lamentably we will descend into some form of Egyptian winter will be tested by how the Coptic Christian minority is treated with full equality before the law, equal protection and equal treatment of the law.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I am sure everyone appreciates the honesty, straightforwardness and integrity of the hon. member not only for his words but for his actions.

Is there anything the hon. member wants to add to what he has already spoken about?

Hon. Irwin Cotler: Mr. Chair, the only thing I would add is that at times such as these qui s'excuse s'accuse; whoever remains indifferent will indict himself or herself.

As my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Agincourt, mentioned throughout his speech, we have to appreciate the sense of urgency and we have to act now.

• (2005)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise to speak to an issue of great concern and importance.

Our government believes that religious freedom is a fundamental human right.

We also believe it is the building block for healthy democracies, which is why we continue to strongly condemn the vicious attacks on Egyptian Coptic Christians and their institutions. People of faith must be able to practise and worship their religion in peace and security.

Tragically, after sharing in the hope of a new Egypt earlier this year, the violence and persecution against the Coptic Christian minority continues.

The current experience of the Coptic community in Egypt and an examination of its rich history deserves particular attention as part of tonight's debate. I am particularly proud to stand with the government that recognized the importance of this issue and proposed the debate take place.

The Copts are native Egyptian Christians and represent the largest Christian community in the Middle East. The Copts' roots in the rural areas around Alexandria where a bombing recently took place taking the lives of 20 worshippers are indeed deep. Their existence dates back to the 5th century and the days of St. Mark. Christians live throughout present day Egypt, but the Coptic Church in Alexandria is recognized as the oldest in Africa.

Although their struggles were far from new, some Coptic Christians living today still remember when President Nasser led a coup d'état against King Farouk in 1952 and established a republic. Their human rights were sometimes violated under Nasser's overarching policy of pan-Arab nationalism and socialism. The Copts were negatively affected by Nasser's nationalization policies because although they represented 10-plus per cent of the population they were relatively prosperous, holding more than 50% of the country's wealth.

During this period, the granting of permits to construct churches was delayed, Christian religious courts were closed and the regime confiscated land and church properties from Copts.

As a result, many Copts emigrated to Australia, Europe and North America.

Those who remain report significant discrimination in modern Egypt.

Many members of the Coptic community participated in the revolution earlier this year and marched arm-in-arm with Egyptians of other faiths in calling for the end of Mubarak's autocratic regime.

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However, since the revolution Copts have been increasingly vulnerable to threats from extremists. They like other groups have suffered as police forces have struggled to rebuild in the revolution's wake. They have been victim to both petty and violent crimes. They have reported increased incidents of kidnapping and extortion. Local police forces have proven powerless in the face of increased religious-based violence.

On October 9, members of Cairo's large Coptic community participated in a march to protest against the destruction of a church. The exact circumstances that led to violence that night are unclear. Some say that strangers infiltrated the protest and instigated the violence. Whatever caused the initial violence, it is clear that security forces intervened with force resulting in the deaths of some 27 people. More than 300 others were injured.

Since the events of October 9, the death of one young Coptic man has captivated public attention. Twenty year old Mina Daniel was a respected young activist who by all accounts was a bright and dedicated future leader. His death, reportedly from gunshot wounds sustained during the clashes, is a painful example of the tremendous loss suffered by the Coptic community and the whole of Egypt.

Egyptians are painfully aware that their country can ill afford to lose such promising individuals at such a pivotal time in their history.

We note that Egyptians of all faiths have denounced the violence of October 9. His Holiness Pope Shenouda III has been at the forefront of these denunciations. We commend his tireless efforts to bridge the Coptic community and the Egyptian leadership to restore peace and unity. We sent Canada's ambassador to meet with him last year to demonstrate our country's solidarity.

We hope that all Egyptians will continue to renew their efforts to promote unity and protect religious minorities in order to prevent such tragedies from being repeated.

• (2010)

There have been a number of positive steps in recent days. Canada will play its part to ensure this continues.

As the process of transition continues to move forward, we call on Egyptian authorities to ensure the protection of Egyptians against all forms of extremism. We also urge the Egyptian people to work to sustain a culture of tolerance.

Copts around the world are joining the movement to bring an end to the violence in Egypt, and I would be remiss if I did not refer especially to the vibrant Coptic diaspora here in Canada. Earlier this month, on behalf of the Prime Minister, I addressed the congregation of Coptic Christians, as did others of my colleagues, at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga, the community adjacent to where I happen to live. I provided our assurances to Coptic Christians in our communities that our government strongly condemns these vicious attacks and calls on the Egyptian government to ensure that the perpetrators of these attacks be brought to justice.

Our commitment is to continue doing our part to protect their religious freedoms and to devote our efforts to prevent harm so that they and their families can feel safe demonstrating their right to practice their faith freely. Outside of Egypt and Sudan, the largest

Coptic communities are in the United States and Canada. In the 60 or so years since the arrival of the first Coptic immigrants to Canada, the community here has grown to number roughly 50,000 today. Canadian Coptic leaders have raised serious concerns regarding the Coptic community in Egypt and our government will continue to listen to them and work with them.

The Prime Minister announced in the Speech From the Throne this year that our government would be creating an office of religious freedom. This office will serve religious minorities who are targeted with violence and persecution around the world. As elected representatives, we must stand up for our friends and neighbours whose families are inflicted with the terrible injustice and contraventions of their fundamental human rights, and we will continue to do exactly that. Likewise, we must show our commitment to protecting the rights of these innocent individuals whose lives are acutely affected by these unspeakable actions. We take the concerns of the Coptic community very seriously, and we will continue to demonstrate our tangible commitment to protecting their right to safety and expressing their beliefs in Canada and throughout the world.

We will continue to effectively engage with this community in an effort to promote and protect the fundamental freedoms of Egyptians. We hope it will usher in a new era of hope and prosperity for Coptic Christians, in particular, as a new and truly democratic Egypt takes shape in the weeks and months ahead.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Chair, the NDP is deeply concerned with the ongoing violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt. The NDP also continues to support the democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people and hopes that the parliamentary elections beginning in November, 2011, will be free and fair.

However, we also know that, in the 2008 throne speech, the government promised to create a new non-partisan democracy promotion agency to support the peaceful transition to democracy in repressive countries and to help emerging democracies build strong institutions.

Could the member opposite please tell the House what happened to this idea and why the government has not created a democracy promotion agency, as it promised three years ago?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I would refer to the statement by the Prime Minister of Canada with regard to the situation in Egypt dated May 9, 2011, where he expressed his concern. He said:

The Government of Canada strongly condemns the violence against Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Canada is a tolerant, multicultural country with a proud tradition of defending religious minorities around the world. We stand behind the Coptic Christian community and their right to practice their faith in safety and security, free of persecution. This is a universal human right and one which our Government is committed to defending.

Recognizing that religious pluralism is inextricably linked to democratic development, our Government has committed to creating a special Office of Religious Freedom to monitor and help ensure religious minorities can practice their faith without fear of violence and repression.

On behalf of all Canadians, I express my deepest condolences to those who have lost loved ones during these events. Our thoughts and prayers are with all Egyptians as they face the difficult challenges ahead.

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The point is that, from the Prime Minister on down, all of us are extremely concerned and there are efforts under way to deal with this issue in a more effective, more assertive and much more proactive way, and his statement validates all of that.

• (2015)

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I respect the associate minister, having known him in his pre-political life. I do not think there is much he said with which I actively disagree. However, where is the meat in what he said?

My two colleagues have asked for immediate action, for the Prime Minister to call the UN secretary-general or to urge a debate in the UN Human Rights Council. I have not heard anything concrete coming out of his mouth. In particular, has the Egyptian ambassador to Canada been called on the carpet in order for him to hear the view of the Canadian government? If so, what has he been told? We have not heard that either, or when.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, my understanding is that diplomatic communications are in fact taking place on this very issue. Our concerns are being addressed directly to the Egyptian representatives here in Canada and beyond. We are actively engaged in dealing with this issue on many different fronts.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, clearly, religious freedoms are human rights: the right to believe and exercise one's belief through faith and religious gathering together, or through no faith and no decisions to gather together. These are fundamental human rights and the oppression of Coptic Christians in Egypt is of deep concern to Canadians.

I want to ask the hon. minister about the other religious groups that are being abused, such as the Baha'i in Iran and the Tibetan monks who are increasingly turning to the desperate tactic of self-immolation. In the context of this debate, what can Canada do, other than creating an office?

I must say that I am skeptical about creating an office. All of our diplomacy should be directed toward human rights, not segmented into one small office.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for her bigger picture of the very serious issue of the infringement of human rights.

At the first meeting of the newly structured office with respect to religious freedoms and so forth, which we spoke about earlier, some 100 various religions were represented at the meeting. There is significant engagement of the broader religious minorities in this new office structure that I believe will be very effective in dealing with these issues on a more international level.

The hon. member's point is well taken. There are many disenfranchised, discriminated religions and minorities worldwide. I think this particular office is an effective way to begin to make those kinds of inroads on a united front.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, the Canadian Coptic Centre, to which the associate minister referred in his comments, is in my riding. I very much appreciate the many members of Parliament, including members opposite, for visiting and showing solidarity with the Coptic community.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister announced our commitment to the office of religious freedoms in the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga. Two weeks ago, as the associate minister knows, we had a very important meeting with the community and talked about these issues.

Could the associate minister share a little more of what he shared with the audience that day in solidarity with the Coptic community of what our government is doing and how proactive we are being on this file?

• (2020)

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for his support of the Coptic community, which I know is very profound and on a very active basis.

At that particular time, we were all moved by the outpouring of concern and the attendance at that particular gathering. Moreover, we realized full well that, although we expressed concern with genuine sentiment, all of these people either had friends, family or ties directly back to the very place where so much of the discrimination, harassment and difficulties are experienced.

In essence, and not in a political sense but in a conscientious, responsible way, as this issue transcends politics, we shared with them directly that we stand shoulder to shoulder with Coptic Christians not only here in Canada but with their families, friends and communities back home.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, what would the mandate be for the office of religious freedom? What would it produce in terms of reports, policies, recommendations? Who would be hired to work in this office, especially as we are downsizing now and cutting the public service? How would having a separate office of religious freedom fit with the department's overall work promoting human rights?

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Chair, the promotion and protection of human rights is basically what is, in essence, the scope and the mission of the office. That would transcend into a commitment to and support of individual rights to freedom of religion and conscience. Directly under the Minister of Foreign Affairs, this particular office would engage widely with not only the communities here within the religious freedom situation but also on an international level, such as, as was mentioned earlier, the United Nations, if need be, and, moreover, internationally as circumstances evolve.

In fairness, this is a new thing. It is building as we speak. I want to assure the hon. member that the uptake has just been so remarkable. In the very first meeting, there were some 100 religious representatives in attendance to help us deliver and produce a truly international tool to deal with these issues.

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala (Honoré-Mercier, NDP): Mr. Chair, a wave of anti-Christian violence has once again hit Coptic Christians in Egypt. About 100 radicals stormed a Coptic neighbourhood. Approximately 10 people died and about 100 were injured in clashes between Christians and Islamic assailants. Despite being alerted repeatedly, law enforcement allegedly did not try to disarm or truly oppose the crowds of assailants led by religious leaders. The Christians were allegedly left to defend themselves.

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For years, to justify their hatred for and attacks against Egyptian Christians, Islamists have been spreading a rumour that Coptic Christians were responsible for the kidnapping of two Muslims. Al-Qaeda picked up the story in October 2010 and announced that this justified the killing of any Christians in Islamic lands.

Regardless of the causes, we can take a stand and state that nothing justifies the aggression and attacks that are committed against Coptic Christians and other minorities in Egypt on a regular basis. These attacks are the latest in a long history of persecution and vicious attacks, often committed with total impunity and sometimes even with the passive complicity of the army and police.

Another attack, which resulted in 13 deaths, occurred in March 2011, just after the departure of President Mubarak. There too, radicals stormed a Coptic church and then set it afire.

Never in Egypt's history has inter-religious violence been so intense and threatening. Muslims and secularists are also victims of this climate of hatred. Even worse, far from imparting values of tolerance and citizenship, Egyptian textbooks and public television make a commonplace of xenophobic propaganda that stigmatizes religious minorities. It is therefore likely that the situation will only get worse. Although the Egyptians are being offered the chance to turn the page on past repression, they risk being taken hostage by fanaticism.

That is why it is so important that the dialogue between Egyptians and the self-examination of their own society, which led to the uprising and mobilization of all Egyptian classes and communities, should continue in order to lead the country to a democracy that represents all citizens.

It is important to understand that fanatical movements take power in a climate of political repression and often do so by coups d'état. Such was the case in Egypt, where one family or clan was leading the country according to its own whims for decades. This type of takeover relies on secret preparations with reliable partners. The key solidarity networks—the extended family, the village, the ethno-religious group—provide a sure and effective means of political mobilization.

Until now, Egypt's political and social system was based on a strong, centralist state, controlled by a discriminating minority. These days, we have to do everything we can to support the great transformation the Egyptians are expecting. Canada has to stand up with the Egyptians now when it matters most.

We have to speak out loud and clear on behalf of all minorities in Egypt who now are entitled to a say in the governance of their country. Canada has to support the Egyptian people during the transformation of the systems of government before they are taken hostage again by the empire of fear.

• (2025)

There is a chance now, an opportunity to see an example of the strength of democracy and dialogue at work. However, there is also a risk that violent movements will prevent free expression of the Egyptians' hopes and ambitions. There is a risk that fear will once again take hold of the communities that have been excluded from power for so long.

Do you know the real source of the suffering? It is silence. The silence that is imposed by brutality, the silence of those who lose their voice under the reign of terror, but most of all the silence of those who watch without condemning, and without allowing their humanity to take over. Those who remain silent about others' misfortune are part of the problem.

One thing is for certain: no Canadian wants to see any harm done to the Egyptians. We have a duty—we, as members of Parliament from all parties—to unite our voices in denunciation.

That is why, to counter this devastating silence, we must impose a dialogue. As Canadians, with our imperfect but aspirational democracy, we must continue this dialogue with the Egyptians to let them see what we see, let them see the wealth of their nation and the importance of their actions for the future of the world.

We can never use force. It is unnecessary and unjustified. Above all, it is unthinkable and unacceptable to even consider it. From a distance, there are no identifiable targets in this cultural conflict. Only ignorance, intolerance and silence are at fault. Therefore, military violence cannot help the Egyptian minorities.

We cannot impose an embargo. It would be cruel and of no use to the people who are already being held hostage. It would only feed the discourse of hatred that is already so destructive. However, we can use our voice not only to continue the dialogue with the Egyptians, but also to force all the social, ethnic and religious factions in Egypt to continue the dialogue amongst themselves. It is a prerequisite for democracy.

Canada can speak up and influence its many partners to do so also. The Prime Minister of Canada has the moral authority to unite the political voices throughout the world.

The Prime Minister will surely decide to take advantage of the Commonwealth heads of government meeting, being held in Australia, to unite the voices of allies, and to appeal to the Egyptians and convince them to bear witness to hope and tolerance, not hate, violence and intolerance. As with many of today's problems, education will bring about solutions. These cultural conflicts motivated by prejudice and intolerance feed on systemic disinformation.

We have seen how the Egyptians, through the Internet and social media among other means, were able to develop a vision and see through the local propaganda. We need to do everything we can, as parliamentarians and Canadians, to determine how Canada can support the development of new and independent media and continued dialogue between Egypt and the rest of the world.

Our message must be strong and unequivocal: democracy and the respect of democratic countries cannot be attained without including minorities, or without recognizing the richness of the people, diversity and dialogue.

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I add my voice to all those who wish to build democracy and respect human rights because a strong voice is what is needed for the minorities in Egypt. Last Tuesday at the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, we had the opportunity to hear from three Egyptian citizens. They made some suggestions. First, they suggested creating a task force, within the Department of Foreign Affairs, on cultural minorities in the Middle East. They then suggested directly expressing Canada's deep concerns to the head of the supreme council of the armed forces, in person.

•(2030)

The issue of protecting minorities in emerging democracies in the Middle East needs to remain on the agenda of the G8 and other international groups. We need to work with other western countries in reacting to the daily persecution of minorities in Egypt and elsewhere. Finally, we need to apply a strategy that includes dialogue with the Egyptians and support for civil society.

Violence is used to legitimize the seizing of power by minority groups. Egyptians are opposed to violence and oppression, and they are motivated by hope. The recent uprising by a group of Egyptians that expelled terror from their social reality cannot be vilified by the actions of an extremist minority. Force against the Egyptian people is an unacceptable option. It would be unacceptable to make them suffer the consequences of the actions of a few anarchists. Anything other than dialogue and support for civil society would be unforgiveable.

In order to quash ignorance, in order to derail prejudice, in order to silence the calls to violence, in order to denounce those who use fear to promote an ideology and to rise to power, Canada must continue to emphasize the importance of education, inclusion and dialogue among the Egyptian people so that the multitude will come forth. They are the true source of wealth for that wonderful country.

•(2035)

[English]

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Chair, the plight of the Coptic people and the affront on their right to exercise their religious freedom in Egypt is not only an attack on a Coptic community; it is an attack on freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, indeed, to all of us living in the free world where we have the opportunity to speak our minds, practice our faith and to live together in unity and harmony with love and respect for one another.

Our Prime Minister has taken a position by condemning the actions in Egypt against the Coptic community from day one. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs has shown leadership in the highest international body, the United Nations.

Indeed, what I have heard from the hon. member, and I appreciated her remarks, was a feeling that we should all be united, in solidarity, with respect, standing side by side with the Coptic people.

I wanted to ask if that is really the message she wanted to get out with her speech.

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I agree with my dear colleague. We must stand united to defend freedom of expression and to build a country where everyone has the right to participate. We can think differently, but we must tolerate all ideals, no matter what they are. What we must not tolerate is violence. I completely agree that everything must be done peacefully. There must be discussions, dialogues, to build democracy and to help countries that are emerging democracies. Canada has experience, expertise and the means to do so. We must be there, but we must absolutely not use this violence to impose a violent decision or our own ideals. I agree with my colleague.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Chair, like all Canadians, we see the images, whether it is on *CTV News* or any media outlet. We see those horrific images, and it is very difficult. It makes a lot of people very angry. We get very passionate.

Individuals like the member for Scarborough—Agincourt spoke inside the Chamber, as others have spoken inside the Chamber, and I point out my colleague because I have seen him speak out within our caucus, and I have seen him speak out to our Leader of the Liberal Party.

It is very upsetting to see what is happening in Egypt today. I am glad that we are having this debate. I am encouraged by it. *Hansard* does not necessarily show that we have a number of members of that faith who are observing. We have Canadians from coast to coast watching the proceedings today. We recognize that this is something that touches the very soul of all people.

We want and believe in religious freedom. Our hearts and prayers go out to Coptic Christians around the world, particularly those who are living through the persecution in Egypt today.

I look to my colleague and pose this question. What does the member believe could specifically be done today? My colleague from Scarborough—Agincourt has talked about the Egyptian ambassador. Maybe the Minister of Foreign Affairs or the Prime Minister could make that call, arrange that meeting.

What would the member like to see happen today that she thinks could make a difference?

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, as I said, we need to speak up at every possible opportunity.

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But I would like to talk about my own experience. I lived under a dictatorship for 17 years. I am well acquainted with violence. Some of my friends were killed, my brother was detained and tortured, and I myself was injured from being kicked. Yet I have always believed in non-violence. In Chile, we managed to say “no” to a dictator with the stroke of a pencil. I recall that time, when we were able to establish a dialogue. Some groups in my country said that changes could be made using force, but that was the minority. We were able to do something, despite the suffering and everything else. The church was on our side; it was very present. However, everyone came together, regardless of their beliefs. We all believed in creating a new country. We were able to establish a dialogue, even with some parts of the dictatorship. It was incredible. However, we had a mediator. Dialogue is what began the transition towards democracy in my country.

When I talk about dialogue, I am talking about something that I experienced, something that came out of the violence I also experienced. So it is possible.

• (2040)

Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Chair, we are all here this evening to come up with things Canada can and should do in order to support the people of Egypt in their hopes for democracy.

I would like to know what things we should definitely do, and more importantly, what my colleague thinks we should absolutely avoid doing.

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I would like to put on the table the suggestions that were made by the Egyptian people on Monday.

They suggest that a Middle Eastern cultural minorities working group be created within the Department of Foreign Affairs; that Canada express its serious concerns directly and in person to the leaders of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt; that the issue of protecting minorities in emerging Middle Eastern democracies continue to be put on the agenda of all G8 and other international meetings; and that Canada work with the other western countries to respond to the persecution.

However, what should never be done is to use brutality in a military intervention or impose an embargo on Egypt or place restrictions on the Egyptian people.

[English]

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank this member for her very thoughtful speech. I enjoy working with her on the foreign affairs committee, and indeed she did refer to the fact that the foreign affairs committee did a study on this very issue this past Tuesday. She will know that the officials from the Department of Foreign Affairs reported that the Prime Minister of Canada raised this very issue at the G8 summit earlier this year in Deauville, France. He was instrumental in having the plight of the Coptic Christians reported on in the report from the G8 conference.

The member will also know, from the report of the officials at the foreign affairs committee, that the Minister of Foreign Affairs raised this very issue in his maiden speech to the UN General Assembly in September. She also knows that Canada is only the second country in

the world to establish an office of religious freedom, so it will focus on these kinds of persecutions around the world.

Could she tell us what she thinks individual Canadians can do to get other countries in the world to call for that UN investigation, as Canada has done?

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I will once again respond from my own personal experience.

I remember that it was very important to us, during the dictatorship, when a person sent a letter to Amnesty International. That may seem like nothing but it was extremely important. We must speak out, often just via the Internet. It is easy. These are things that each of us can do and little by little, drop by drop, we make an ocean. This approach was successful. People were being tortured and everyone knew it, and finally the dictatorship gave way.

Yes, the people of Canada can get involved in human rights organizations. They can also demonstrate and force us, as members of Parliament, to do something here.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my hon. colleague from Winnipeg North. I know he has St. Mark Coptic community in Winnipeg. I believe it is on Pembina on the south side. He was there with the congregation the night that things happened in Egypt.

My hon. colleague was in the external affairs committee on Tuesday morning. Does she remember the conversation that took place? I just want to confirm, because some of my colleagues across the way in the Conservative Party might not have remembered. Was there a question posed and an answer given by officials that nothing has been done to date by the government about calling for an emergency debate at the United Nations, and/or the taking up of this cause by the UNHRC? Does she remember those words?

• (2045)

[Translation]

Ms. Paulina Ayala: Mr. Chair, I admit that I do not really remember. I think we would have to see the documents and the summary.

I really cannot answer that question. If I did, my answer would be based solely on speculation.

[English]

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise this evening to participate in this very important debate. I believe that all members, and in fact all Canadians, share my deep concern about the ongoing persecution of Coptic communities in Egypt, which most recently escalated in the tragic October 9 incident in Cairo leaving 27 people dead and more than 300 injured.

Most of the victims of that incident were members of Egypt's Coptic community, a religious minority that comprises about 10% of the country's population. Sadly, this vicious attack was the most violent incident since the fall of the Mubarak regime in February of this year.

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Before speaking to the situation of the Copts in Egypt, I will begin my remarks by providing an overview of the recent developments in Egypt as it transitions into a democracy, one that we all hope will respect human rights and the rule of law.

Egypt is entering a critical period in its transition. Like our partners around the world, the Government of Canada is watching with a keen eye. It was inspiring earlier this year to watch as Egyptian people of all ages, faiths and walks of life courageously demanded a better life. Egyptians brought about transformative change through peaceful protest and not through the infliction of violence or terrorist acts.

What has happened in Egypt has had important implications for other countries within that region. What happens in Egypt has the potential to affect the transitions under way in other countries, and the developments in Egypt over the coming months and years will shape the region and have a profound effect on its stability.

That is why it is important for Canada and all of us as Canadians to remain engaged. I believe all members will recall the attack on Coptic Christians leaving a Christmas mass in Nag Hammadi in January 2010, as well as the devastating suicide bombing of a church in Alexandria during the celebration of New Year's mass.

Canada condemned these events in the strongest terms. And as I mentioned before, the recent clashes that took place in Cairo between Egyptian security forces and Coptic Christian protesters unfortunately and very tragically killed 27 people and injured more than 300 women, men and children. I actually saw a video of that at the Coptic church a couple of Sundays ago, and I was absolutely horrified with what I saw.

Following this latest round of violence, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a strong statement in which he urged "all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities can live and prosper together and build a new Egypt".

On Sunday, at the minister's request, Canada's chargé d'affaires in Cairo met with Bishop Youannes, General Bishop and Private Secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, at St. Mark's Cathedral to express Canada's concern and continued support for reform. At that time the chargé provided the bishop with a copy of the resolution adopted unanimously by all members of the House on October 17, which in particular condemned the attacks and called on the government to bring the perpetrators of this heinous act to justice.

• (2050)

Coptic Christians have been an integral part of Egyptian society since around the 5th century A.D. Over the centuries, Copts and Muslims have co-existed peacefully, and the overwhelming majority of Egyptians today support that religious tolerance, but tensions between the ruling military council and the Coptic community have been exacerbated by the most recent incident and the ones preceding it.

These violent attacks originate with extremists who fundamentally do not accept the religious pluralities. It is up to the Egyptian people and their government to prevent this type of intolerance and violence from becoming the way of the future. This is not what their revolution was about; quite the opposite. Egyptians of all faiths,

Muslims and Copts, marched together in Tahrir Square during the revolution under the slogan, "We are all Egyptians". After the clashes on October 9, hundreds of Muslims and Christians participated in a unity march to urge Egyptians of all faiths to work together to end this senseless violence.

Our government welcomed this commitment by the Egyptian government to bring those responsible to justice and the introduction of a new law that toughens the penalties for discrimination. The process leading to a civilian democratic government is entering a very critical stage. It was a positive step last March when 77% of Egyptians voted in favour of constitutional amendments that shortened the presidential term, created a two-term limit and restricted the ability to declare and renew a state of emergency. It is also positive that the ruling military council has committed to a timeline for transition to civilian rule.

Parliamentary elections are scheduled to begin on November 28, to be held in three stages, ending in March of next year. Our government recognizes that there are considerable challenges going forward as Egyptians work to define the political and economic foundations of their new Egypt. Stability will need to be maintained while ensuring respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in particular for women. A culture of pluralism and tolerance of diversity will need to be promoted and good relations with regional neighbours maintained.

While we recognize these difficulties, Canada expects the Egyptian government to uphold internationally recognized human rights norms. Our government, led by the Prime Minister, has committed to setting up an office of religious freedoms to combat this type of intolerance and to promote freedom of religion and freedom of conscience as key objectives of Canadian foreign policy.

I know that all hon. members are concerned by any and all reports of violence in Egypt or anywhere in the world. As Canadians, we enjoy the rights and privileges that come with living in a free and democratic society. We will continue to stand up for religious minorities around the world, and I invite all members of the chamber to join our government in doing so.

• (2055)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I was at the same meeting my colleague referred to. It was just outside of his riding in Mississauga. We saw the videos of the tragedy. We all took turns and spoke. Yes, there is a video that says two MPs, one mike. I know his colleague rushed over to get the mike from my hand. We all agree that we must do something more. We all agree that we have to get moving.

I want to ask my colleague if he knows whether his government has called the Egyptian ambassador to come to 125 Sussex and to be held accountable, if he knows whether the Prime Minister has made the phone call to Ban Ki-moon, if he knows whether the rapporteur for religious affairs for the UNHCR has been called. I believe she is Asma Jahangir, in Pakistan. If he does not have the phone number, I will gladly give it to him. Does he know if any of these steps have been taken?

Government Orders

I want him to give a straightforward and honest answer. If he does not know, he can say he is not aware and he does not know. We will not buy mumbo-jumbo. Copts in this country need to know. They need to know that the government is doing something and what it is doing. If the hon. member can honestly assure us that this has taken place, I ask him to stand in his place and present those facts.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, I want to express my appreciation and thanks to the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for coming to the Canadian Coptic Centre which is in my riding. I also appreciate the hon. member's attending the march this past Sunday in Toronto. We spoke there. We can agree to disagree on the process and how things work. We can talk about that.

The interesting fact is that the Conservative Party was represented by MPs and the Liberal Party was represented by MPs, but not one single New Democrat MP showed up at either one of those events. I think that says something, which I think is unfortunate. The NDP has lots of Toronto MPs now, and they could have been there.

Having said that, the Minister of Foreign Affairs was the first major minister of any government in the world to speak out on this issue. No other country has asked for an independent investigation. No other country has raised this at the United Nations. Canada has.

I am proud of our Prime Minister and our Minister of Foreign Affairs for speaking out on this issue.

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very happy the member opposite mentioned the important role women should play in the democratic development process.

On this side of the House, we are very concerned that in the transitional period in Egypt women have largely been excluded from high-level constitutional talks. We would like to see the Canadian government urge Egypt to ensure that women are equal participants in the democratic development process, given Canada's obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

We also know that the thematic focus of Canada's aid commitment in Egypt according to CIDA is to help the country generate economic growth. While economic development is crucially important to developing emerging economies, now is the time to focus an equal amount of our resources on democratic development. Would the member opposite agree?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, again, I think it is unfortunate that not one single representative of the New Democratic Party showed up at either of the events, either the one in my riding two weeks ago or the one in Toronto last Sunday, to voice these very concerns. I think the Coptic community would have appreciated hearing from the New Democratic Party on these issues. It is the official opposition, the "government in waiting". Not one single member of that party showed up at either one of those very important events.

Tonight it is interesting to hear the sanctimonious language from the NDP as to what we are supposed to do, or giving us lessons on what we should or should not do.

Here are the facts. This government stands up for democracy around the world. We have the best Minister for Status of Women this country has ever seen. She stands up for women's issues, not just domestically but around the world. We are leaders in that.

Our government stands up for democracy and freedom every single time. We are always the first government to stand up and do that. We will keep doing that, not just on this issue as far as Coptic Christians are concerned, but any time minorities need support in countries around the world, Canada will always be with them.

• (2100)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Chair, something that I do not get to say from this side of the House as the leader of the Green Party very often is that I am also pleased our Prime Minister has raised this. I am also pleased that Canada has asked for the United Nations to intervene.

I am sorry that Canada is the only country so far that has raised it. I think the United Nations and other nations should come to the aid of Coptic Christians. This is a significant issue, and we have seen it all too often. We topple a dictator, be it a Ceausescu or be it a Tito, and then we see ethnic cleansing, then we see sectoral violence, then we hear things being said such as, "We rejoice at the loss of a dictator, but where are the voices of the international community to protect the religious rights, the human rights of women, persecuted Christians, persecuted Muslims, persecuted Baha'i, and persecuted Tibetans?"

Where will the government's relative priorities be in dealing with the new government in Egypt?

We have a new ambassador, a fine person by the way; I commend the government again. Ambassador Drake is a brilliant choice, a person with a terrific background. He is just going to Cairo now to set up shop. What is his top priority: protecting Coptic Christians or protecting Canadian trade?

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, I think that was the best question of any I have had tonight. I want to thank the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for being a strong, non-partisan advocate on this because this is not a partisan debate tonight. This is about showing our solidarity for Coptic Christians in Egypt. That is why we called for this debate and it is why we are having it.

I suspect the main role of the new ambassador will be to voice Canada's grave concerns over the way religious minorities are treated in Egypt. Yes, there will be trade discussions, but I am fairly sure the number one message our new ambassador will send is that Canada will not stand for religious minorities in Egypt continuing to be persecuted and attacked. That is the number one priority. That is why we are having this debate tonight. That is the message we are sending to Egypt by members being here tonight. I thank members of the House for being here tonight and participating in this very important debate.

Government Orders

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, in that vein, I would like to commend the hon. member for Mississauga—Streetsville on his very knowledgeable speech on this issue and, like him, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. This should be a debate where we are all speaking as one voice and expressing our outrage, the outrage of Canadians, about this ongoing persecution of the Coptic people in Egypt. I am very sorry that some members of this House have tried to turn it into a partisan political debate.

The member mentioned in his speech that the Prime Minister made a commitment to create an office of religious freedom at the Canadian Coptic Centre in the member's riding earlier this year. I wonder if the member could expand on whether he thinks the fact that the announcement was made at the Canadian Coptic Centre says something about what the focus of this office of religious freedom may be.

Mr. Brad Butt: Mr. Chair, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs has been working extremely hard on this issue. Before I was elected on May 2, I had an opportunity to work with the member for Mississauga—Erindale when he was elected in the last Parliament, in working with our Coptic community. We spent a lot of time talking to people and listening to the issues. I am proud to be part of a government that is standing up on this issue.

During the election campaign, the Prime Minister came to my riding of Mississauga—Streetsville and made the historic announcement that Canada would be the second country in the world to establish an office of religious freedom. With meat on the bones, this office is going to have clout. This office is going to mean something around the world. I am so proud to be part of a government that takes the persecution of religious minorities around the world very seriously, and is actually going to do something about it. I look forward to the office being established and getting on with the job.

• (2105)

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Chair, I rise this evening to speak to this issue because of a particular relationship that I have. St. Mary & St. Moses, one of the few Coptic Orthodox churches in southwestern Ontario is in my riding.

As a country we have a moral responsibility to the rest of the world to speak out on occasions like this and to take what action we are capable of taking. In addition, it is important to realize the added responsibility we have for this particular community.

We have heard some figures this evening. There are approximately 60,000 to 65,000 Egyptians living in Canada as citizens or permanent residents. The vast majority of them, some 50,000, are Christian Coptic Orthodox members. I know from speaking to them, particularly the conversations I had as the demonstrations were taking place in Egypt to bring down the Mubarak regime, the fear and in some cases even the terror that was being felt.

I remember having a telephone conversation in the lobby right outside the chamber with one of the leaders of the community in Windsor. He was certainly aware of the systemic discrimination the Coptic Christians have suffered in Egypt for a good number of years. He was aware of the violence, discrimination and bigotry that had been demonstrated by individual members of the community against his community. He said to me, "It is amazing what is happening. We

are going into that square as a collective community, Muslim and Christian, hand in hand, arms around each other, to build the strength that we need to bring down the dictator and to begin democracy in our country". His words were very eloquent; I am not doing justice to him. He continued, "We are doing this to achieve religious freedom and democratic freedom, human rights freedom for all Egyptians, but in particular for the Coptic Christians". They have a long history of discrimination.

Then we saw the violence. I have seen a lot of violence over the years, but I was shocked. It reminded me of Tiananmen Square when the tanks rolled in and literally rolled over those students. We saw the same thing happening, the targets in this case mostly being Christian Coptics. Several of them were chased down and run over by military vehicles. I am a lawyer by background and I do not want to draw an absolute conclusion of guilt here, but it is hard to draw any other but that those were intentional acts against innocent protestors.

Canada has a leading role to play in this because of the credibility that we still have in the international arena, in spite of some of the things the government has done. We are well known as a country that not only tolerates, but in fact celebrates the diversity of our people, whether that is religious diversity, language diversity, or whatever. We know we can live together in harmony and peace. We know we can be a beacon for that harmony and peace for the rest of the world.

• (2110)

Because we have that unique stature, it goes with a responsibility to speak out and to do whatever we can when we see this kind of, not to use too strong a term, criminal behaviour that amounts to crimes against humanity.

We need that independent inquiry. It is an absolute must. We must do whatever we can as a country, through the United Nations, through other independent international organizations, to be sure that the transition government in Egypt puts that in place in a meaningful way, with a meaningful mandate, dealt with by independent judicial figures, whether they come from Egypt or elsewhere in the world, and that those people who carried out that most recent attack against innocent people are brought to justice and dealt with in accordance with the law.

The other thing we have to look at is our relationship with Egypt, government to government. We have to tell Egypt very clearly that our foreign aid, our willingness to provide assistance in this transition period as it is building its democracy, as the government, whatever it turns out to be over these next number of months, depends on it allowing for that freedom of religion. Hopefully, those elections will be conducted freely and fairly. It would be great to see the government change its position and allow independent observers in. It is hard to imagine that there will be an acceptance, either by the people of Egypt or the international community, if it does not allow that. However, at the end of the day, when those elections are over and the Egyptians are working on their constitution, we have to say that we are there to help, but that we will not provide that help unless there is freedom of religion, unless the discrimination against the Coptic community ceases.

Government Orders

It is not the first time, and I know there have been several other members of the House this evening who have mentioned this, that we have seen this type of thing happen, that a dictator is brought down, that a brutal regime comes to an end. However, what we see so often is a period of chaos. Again, I know that is not happening in all parts of Egypt, but it is happening in some parts of it and it is happening sporadically. When that happens, the type of massacre that occurred on October 9 happens. We have to tell the Egyptian government, and in particular the military in Egypt, that this is not acceptable. The Egyptians have the ability to impose order. They have the ability to protect Coptic community. Because they have the ability to do so, they have a corresponding responsibility.

We are proud as a nation for the work that we did at the United Nations in developing the principle of the responsibility to protect. However, that is a responsibility, a guiding principle that all governments must abide by, that they do not have a right in a systematic way to discriminate against any part of their population, that they do not have a right, either by direct means or indirect means, to exercise violence against their community or minority communities on whatever basis they might be discriminating.

We have to be very clear that we will not tolerate any lesser standard. This is not imposing our standards on the Egyptian people. This is an international human rights standard to which that all countries must live. Egypt is a member of the UN. It has already signed on to the human rights declaration. That declaration includes the responsibility to allow freedom of religion, whatever that religion is, within their boundaries.

It is quite clear that we have a role to play, we have a responsibility to those people who have come from Egypt, the Coptic Christians in particular, to do our utmost. There are very clear things that we should be doing, both at the UN and directly with the Egyptian transition government. We must do that forcefully, we must do it honestly and we must be consistent in it. It is the only way we will be able to shine the light on that kind of discrimination. Once we shine the light on it, there is a very good opportunity to end it once and for all.

• (2115)

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I have a high regard for my colleague opposite. I have had the privilege of working with him over the last number years and I currently serve on the procedure and House affairs committee with him.

I think all of us here tonight can agree that freedom of religion is probably the most basic freedom that any society can give its people. All other freedoms flow from that, such as the freedom of assembly, freedom of speech and the freedom of the press.

Our Prime Minister has given great international leadership on this issue over the years, repeatedly speaking out against violence and oppression. Our Minister of Foreign Affairs, just recently on September 10, made the statement:

Religious extremism has no place in modern society and the new Egypt. Canada urges all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities can live and prosper together and build a new Egypt.

Freedom of religion is a fundamental human right and a vital building block for healthy democracies. People of faith must be able to practise and worship in peace and security.

My colleague will know that in our recent throne speech we committed to establishing the office of religious freedom. I think I know the answer, but can I count on my colleague and his party to enthusiastically support this initiative to establish the office of religious freedom?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, in principle, there is no question that we would be supportive of it.

Again, my colleague and I have had a number of experiences working together and we do have great respect for each other. I appreciate that from him and pass it back. However, I am worried about the commitment of the government. Three years have now gone by and an agency that was promised to be established to help promote democracy across the globe is basically non-existent up to this point. I am very concerned that we may see a similar result with regard to this new agency to deal with religious freedom.

I am supportive of both. Quite frankly, it would be better if we combined the two and work at the international level with enough resources to have impact on both helping democracies grow around the globe and, as part of that, that human rights, such as religious freedoms, are incorporated into those democracies.

I have to express some reservation, but we would be supportive of it in principle.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Chair, once again, my hon. colleague has given his usual thoughtful speech on the subject of the day.

I want to follow-up on the question that was just posed with respect to the office of religious freedom.

The only other country that has this office is the United States. I had occasion to be down in Washington a couple of years ago and visited with the director of that office. He is a very bright, capable young man. He told me about the office itself, what it did and what it hoped to do. He said that it was initially set up under the presidency of George Bush. However, under the Republican regime, it turned into a glorified recruitment office for the Republican Party, paid for at taxpayer expense. Under the administration of President Obama, that entire process was circumscribed quite deliberately.

Does the hon. member for Windsor—Tecumseh have a similar concern with respect to the use and potential abuse of this office in that it might well become a very partisan political recruitment office rather than what I and others hoped it would be, which is an office that would address issues such as we are debating tonight?

• (2120)

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, I was aware of the experience of the office in the United States under the Bush administration. I understand the Obama administration has maintained the office but, for lack of a better term, has cleaned it up in terms of partisanship and political patronage. I believe the administration has also downsized it fairly appreciably. I do not know if that will be ongoing or not or if it will build it back up and try to do with it what it was originally intended for and had fairly broad support.

Government Orders

I will repeat what I said earlier to my Conservative colleague. My bigger concern right now is whether we will just see a repeat of what happened with the agency that was supposed to be established three years ago to deal with encouraging and supporting democracies around the globe. We have seen no activity there at all. I would hope that would not happen. I would hope the two agencies would be put together under foreign affairs and be used appropriately around the globe.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, I had the pleasure of serving with my colleague on the justice committee and most recently on the Supreme Court of Canada selection panel where we worked very collegially. I know him to be a thoughtful and reasonable member.

He mentioned the international community's requirement to hold the new government of Egypt, the one that we hope will be elected in the parliamentary elections which will start later this year, accountable. How can we hold it to account, to protect the rights of religious minorities? What can we do to ensure that the new government in its new constitution and through its actions actually protects the rights of religious minorities in Egypt?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, as always, we have the problem of finding that balance of recognizing its sovereign rights. However, again, it is a very clear requirement. The Egyptian government has signed on to the Declaration of Human Rights just like everybody at the UN has. It has to live up to that. That declaration includes religious freedom.

It is our responsibility at the UN, with our foreign aid, to hold the Egyptian government accountable, as we have done with any number of other countries over the years, as we are doing right now. In spite of some of the things he has done historically, the Prime Minister has begun to push the Sri Lankan government. I can point to work that we have done in the past as we fought apartheid in South Africa. I can go down the list.

We need to take strong, consistent positions. The Declaration of Human Rights is there and we have all signed on to it. That government must live up to it. If it expects support and co-operation from us government to government, it has to live up to that standard.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Chair, I was quite interested in the hon. member's comment with respect to Egypt signing on for international human rights obligations and things of that nature.

I am given to understand, however, that any signing on to international treaties, and particularly human rights obligations, is subject to a particular provision in the Egyptian constitution and, in effect, it is an exemption. If it is not apparently consistent with Sharia law then it is null and void or Egypt is exempted from that obligation. That makes it therefore extraordinarily difficult to encourage or develop any kind of human rights dialogue if the entity with which we are entering into negotiations already has a pre-existing exemption.

Was the hon. member aware of that? What would his comments be on that matter?

Mr. Joe Comartin: Mr. Chair, I was not aware of it specifically with regard to the Egyptian constitution. I have seen similar provisions in other constitutions of states that have large Muslim

populations and have Sharia law. It sounds like it is a similar clause as in some of those other constitutions.

The first point that I would make with regard to this is that the Egyptian government will be writing a new constitution, we expect fairly soon after the elections are over in the late winter or early spring. We can provide it with some assistance. One of the points we have to make is there are international standards that there can be no exceptions to, such as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, I can go down the list.

Our position has to be that we understand the role of Sharia. We have to recognize that there are many ranges of Sharia law, some that are moderate. It would not concern me if the government applied Sharia law of a more moderate nature. It depends on which one is applied.

● (2125)

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Chair, we are all here participating in this important debate this evening for many reasons. We must ensure that all Canadians are aware of the ongoing persecution of the Coptic people and other religious minorities in Egypt, including the recent atrocities in Maspero in Cairo on October 9.

We must inform the international community of the repeated failure of the Egyptian government to protect the universal human right of freedom of religion for all of its citizens, and we call upon the United Nations Human Rights Council to investigate these most recent killings.

We must, as Canadians and as parliamentarians, say very clearly to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt that we are outraged at the killing of innocent and peaceful protesters in Cairo by members of the Egyptian military and that we insist that they submit to an independent UN investigation of this incident.

We must say very clearly to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces of Egypt that they must accept international election observers to the upcoming Egyptian parliamentary elections, which will commence in November, and we must state clearly, for the future democratically elected government of Egypt, that Canadians demand that Egypt's new constitution protects freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, including the rights of all of its citizens to openly worship and practice their chosen faith without restriction or fear of personal safety.

I believe all members will agree that this is an issue that goes beyond politics and partisanship. As members of Parliament, it is our responsibility to debate and lend our voices to these issues. As Canadians, it is our duty to defend the rights of the vulnerable and to give voice to the voiceless.

The promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights is an integral and long-standing priority of Canadian foreign policy. Democracy offers the best foundation for long-term stability, prosperity and the protection of human rights.

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The Government of Canada has long engaged Egypt and other governments in the region on the need to bring about reform. For many years, we have encouraged Egypt to respect its obligations under international human rights law, and the treatment of minorities is a key aspect of those obligations.

Canada has not been silent on the repeated and continual attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, and we will continue to make our views known in speaking out for what is principled and just.

Immediately following the violence of October 9, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing his deep concern and urged all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities could live and prosper together and build a new Egypt. This was not the first time that Canada had spoken out against this kind of violence, which has brought so much pain and suffering.

At Egypt's universal periodic review, undertaken by the United Nations Council on Human Rights on February 17, 2010, Canada expressed its concern regarding the treatment of religious minorities and called for Egypt to remove any categorization by religion on state documents.

I am especially concerned to note that each Egyptian citizen must carry an identity card that discloses their religion, including whether they may have changed their faith. I am told that this forced disclosure of a person's religion is the cause of much discrimination in Egypt.

In January 2010, we condemned the attacks of Nag Hammadi, where innocent civilians congregating for a religious celebration were viciously attacked and killed.

I remember all too well attending what should have been a joyous celebration on that holy Christmas Eve at the beautiful Church of the Virgin Mary and St. Athanasius in my city of Mississauga and mourning the death of innocent Christian worshippers who were gunned down in front of their families as they left Christmas Eve mass. We condemned these attacks and we called on the Egyptian government to immediately bring the perpetrators to justice. Unfortunately, to date, very little has been done to bring justice for the victims of Nag Hammadi.

On January 1 of this year, we condemned the attacks by extremists on an Alexandria church following the celebration of New Year's mass, which resulted in the death of another 21 worshippers. Once again, I found myself standing in St. Mary's Church in Mississauga grieving alongside friends in the Canadian Coptic community when we should have been celebrating the hope of a new year.

• (2130)

Canadian citizens, members of the Canadian Coptic community and their churches have been threatened. This is unacceptable. It is unacceptable in Canada, it is unacceptable in Egypt and it is unacceptable anywhere in the world.

Earlier this year, the Prime Minister led the inclusion of an expression of concern about vulnerable religious minorities in the Arab Spring declaration of the G8 at Deauville, France.

We have not only spoken words but we have also taken action. At the request of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Canada's chargé

d'affaires met on October 23 with Bishop Youannes, the general bishop and private secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, at St. Mark's Cathedral to express Canada's grave concern.

Over the past 18 months, we have made numerous representations to the government of Egypt about the importance of promoting and protecting the human rights of Coptic Christians. These have been made in Cairo by the Canadian embassy, in Ottawa through the Egyptian embassy, at bilateral meetings between Canadian and Egyptian officials and at multilateral forums such as the United Nations.

On October 16, I attended and spoke at a prayer service regarding the Maspero massacre at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga. On October 21, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and I met with more than 30 leaders of the Coptic community on Parliament Hill to discuss how our government could help protect Coptic Christians here and in Egypt.

Last Sunday, I marched alongside thousands of members of the Canadian Coptic community with several fellow members of the House and addressed a rally at Queen's Park in Toronto.

The persecution against the Coptic community must stop and it must stop now. The destruction of a place of worship and the violence directed toward a community because of people's faith is unacceptable. People of faith must be able to practice and worship in peace and security. This message was delivered by the Minister of Foreign Affairs during his first address to the United Nations General Assembly in September, which included a mention of the plight of the Coptic Christians in Egypt.

During that speech, he reinforced our government's plan to create an office of religious freedom within the Departments of Foreign Affairs and International Trade to help protect religious minorities and to promote the pluralism that is essential to the development of free and democratic societies. He further said:

The long history of humanity has proven that religious freedom and democratic freedom are inseparable.

It was no coincidence that the Prime Minister first announced our commitment to create the office of religious freedom in April of this year at the Canadian Coptic Centre in Mississauga.

Our overriding hope for Egypt is that its transition will continue to be based on the clear desire of Egyptians for respect for human rights, the rule of law and the protection of religious freedoms. It will be especially important for the government of Egypt to ensure that Copts and other religious minorities are protected from violence during the upcoming election period and that they are free to play a meaningful role in the political transition.

Canadians enjoy the rights and privileges that come with living in a free and democratic society in which human rights are respected. We are also keenly aware of the struggles that religious minorities face around the world. It is our common duty to defend the human rights of persons belonging to religious minorities under threat abroad and, through our combined efforts, we are confident that the office of religious freedom can help to do just that.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs recently said:

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Our positions will not soften, our determination will not lessen, and our voices will not be diminished until all citizens can enjoy the freedoms and rights we hold to be universal and true.

This is a challenging task but then again Canadians stand for what is right, not what is easy. I have no doubt that we are up to that challenge. We stand ready to support and assist the Egyptian people, including the Coptic community, as they face the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

• (2135)

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I wonder if my colleague across the way wants to have a repeat performance and come and grab the microphone over here like he did at the church.

More important, language was used at the meeting that he referred to, that he said that we all know. It was something to the effect of “at the United Nations, who runs them and who rules them”. I am just wondering what he meant.

We all make comments and write press releases to impress the people that we write the press releases for. We all beat our chests and say, “I’m Tarzan and I’m going to do this and do that”. The government has written press release after press release and nothing has happened.

I will quote something and I know that the member knows exactly the father I am talking about. Father Angelos wrote an email to me on Wednesday, October 12, 2010, at 10:10 a.m. He stated, “Press releases from our government is not enough anymore”.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs should be aware of this. Since this happened, October 9 to today, has the government engaged and called on the carpet the Egyptian ambassador? Has the government done anything at the United Nations? Has the government done anything at the UNHRC? Has the government done anything with the special rapporteur of the United Nations on religious freedom and—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there to recognize the parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Chair, I can directly confirm for that member that the Minister of Foreign Affairs has raised this Coptic issue directly with the Egyptian ambassador since the events on October 9, and has directly informed him about the resolution of this House. It was just confirmed to me, so I am happy that I was able to confirm that.

The member also mentioned the very Reverend Father Angelos Saad of St. Mary’s Church in Mississauga. I know him very well. He called me the very day that these tragic horrible events happened in Cairo on October 9 and asked me if I could establish, as soon as possible, a meeting with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, and we did exactly that. He came to Ottawa about a week ago with more than 30 Coptic priests representing virtually every church in the greater Toronto area and also Ottawa and Montreal. They had a very long, productive and successful meeting with both the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism.

They expressed a great deal of support for the office of religious freedom and expressed the hope that the government would use this

office of religious freedom, as we have committed to do, to put a spotlight for the world on the plight of the Coptic people in Egypt. I pledge to members tonight that is what our government will do.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Chair, every one of us, all the parliamentarians, are in agreement that what is happening in Egypt to the Coptic Christians is unacceptable. I do not think there is any disagreement among us.

This week, I had the privilege to sit at committee and listen to presentations being made by representatives from the Coptic community. They were very moving.

I think tonight we should see what is happening here. For the first time, we are here in this august House of Commons; it is now 9:40 at night and we are going to continue until 11 p.m. to debate and to shine the light on a persecution that is happening against a religious minority group in Egypt.

I think we need to take a second to absorb that and say that this is how we bring about change. We do not bring about change by raising our voices, yelling and screaming, and throwing darts and arrows. The way we bring about change that is long term, that is sustainable, is through naming the problem, shining the light on it, speaking out, building coalitions and getting support and then supporting the very community to build strong civil society structures so that community in itself, the Egyptian community, with Muslims and Coptic Christians side by side, can build the kind of Egypt where they can all co-exist and cohabit.

I know that when the government held the meeting with different religious groups, as the member said, and announced this new bureau, so to speak, more than 100 people showed up. However, every one of those hundred people have the privilege, and I think it is a privilege for me, to live in a country that is so inclusive and so accepting.

So, why did we not leave this just tied up with the humanitarian work that we do and, instead, focus on—

• (2140)

The Speaker: Order, please.

I will have to stop the member there to give the parliamentary secretary enough time to respond.

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Chair, the hon. member and I have had the recent opportunity to work together on the foreign affairs committee. I would like to congratulate her on her appointment as associate critic for foreign affairs for the New Democratic Party.

She mentioned the office of religious freedoms and the consultations that took place. I can tell members there was representation by people from across Canada of every religion and religious persuasion, many of whom have lived under persecution in other countries around the world. The reason our government has chosen to do this is that freedom of religion and other human rights have always been a focus of Canadian foreign policy.

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In our view, in recent years, the persecution of religious minorities has been getting worse. It has been getting worse in many places in the world, especially in places like Egypt. We need to do something extraordinary, something new, something different to shine Canada's light to the world on what is going on with the persecution of religious minorities, because we believe that we cannot have a real democracy without the protection of the most fundamental of human rights, the right to freedom of religion, conscience and belief. It is enshrined in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Every member of the United Nations is supposed to adhere to that and protect that in their countries, and yet we know that many countries in the world do not do that. That is why we are putting a focus on it. We are going to make it a principal focus of Canadian foreign policy.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Chair, I want to thank my colleague, the parliamentary secretary, for his very passionate speech and his informed responses to the questions that were raised tonight.

Again, it is clear. We are all agreed that the importance of freedom of religion is paramount. And we are all agreed that violence and persecution has no place in any modern society, whether that be Egypt or anywhere else.

However, there are other forms of oppression. There can be oppression that is brought to bear against those who choose to convert from one faith to another. Earlier, my colleague used the phrase in his speech that people must have the right to practise their chosen faith. I think that is key.

I want to ask my colleague to underline whether or not he agrees that freedom of religion must include the right for people to change their faith, to convert to another faith, should they wish to do that and to be sure that they are not subject to other forms of oppression, whether it is violence, economic oppression, social oppression or any of those kinds of oppression.

• (2145)

Mr. Bob Dechert: Mr. Chair, I would like to thank my hon. colleague for his question. He is absolutely right: the right to choose one's religion is enshrined in article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. That declaration is agreed to by every member of the United Nations, and the right to practise one's religion includes the right to choose one's religion. It also includes the right to change one's religion.

As I mentioned in my remarks earlier, one of the things that I am particularly concerned about is that I understand in Egypt every citizen must carry an identity card, which not only must disclose their religion but must disclose whether they have changed their religion. That is a cause of much discrimination in Egypt. I would call on the Egyptian government to eliminate any required disclosure of one's religion in any identity document.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very honoured and hopeful as I rise to speak this evening. The riding of Pierrefonds—Dollard is about one-third francophone, one-third anglophone and one-third allophone. This last group is made up of new Canadians and Canadians who are

already active and completely integrated into the community, but who have a different culture.

This diversity in my riding is one of my greatest sources of pride as the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard. I grew up in this riding and this has benefited me greatly. I am bilingual. I had access to a variety of foods and dishes. I do not know if there is a part of the world that is not represented by a grocery store or restaurant in my riding. As a student, a child, a volunteer, a teacher and now a politician, I have had the opportunity to discover the world through the people who live in my riding.

For example, the City of Dollard-des-Ormeaux organizes an event every year, during which people of all cultures are invited to share their food, music and culture with the people of Dollard-des-Ormeaux and to perform for them. It is a day for people to share cultures and educate others.

In addition to discovering the world through my riding, I have been able to get involved in international issues because of this cultural diversity. For example, a benefit dinner will be held soon to raise funds to help a school in Haiti. Many students as well as adults in the riding will be able to participate.

Why am I sharing all this? Why am I talking about my riding? I want to show to what extent cultural communities are integrated into our community and contribute to the life of the community.

I will even give one or two other examples that show to what extent these cultural communities make a contribution to society. Yesterday was Diwali or Bandi Chhor Divas, and I was invited to a temple. I discovered that the community centre at the temple is open 24 hours a day and that food is provided to anyone who comes to the temple. No matter their religion or origin, anyone who knocks at the door and asks is given food. We also have Anglican churches that provide space to community organizations that fight poverty and Catholic churches that provide free space to Scout groups.

These are but a few examples in my riding. Just imagine what is happening across the country. This lets us see what can be done if we establish inclusive policies, the right to freedom, religious choice, the right to associate and form groups that can become very active and involved in the community, the right to equality before the law, and freedom from discrimination, no matter our origin or beliefs.

Can Canada intervene in a situation that is taking place in another country where a people is subject to discrimination? I believe it can. Of course we still have a long way to go in Canada. Tolerance and acceptance could be improved. Last year, a child was not allowed to wear a turban while playing soccer. He was asked to remove his turban or to not play soccer. In short he had to choose between a religious symbol that was very important to him, and his friends and favourite sport. We still have much work to do in Canada. However, we have managed to establish rights and freedoms that we now take for granted. It is high time Canada took a stand on a number of conflicts, including the one in Egypt that we are addressing today. I will now speak in more detail about the conflict.

• (2150)

Recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs stated that Canada stands in solidarity with all religious minorities in all countries, including Egyptian Coptic Christians. He also called on the Egyptian government to ensure that the attacks stop and he asked that a transparent investigation take place.

I do not want to make this a partisan issue, and I want to congratulate each individual for what we have heard so far. We can see that the commitments made and the concern expressed here in the House today are all in good faith.

What the Minister of Foreign Affairs said is, in many ways, exactly what we are also calling for. First, what we are calling for most urgently is an independent, transparent investigation. We want to shed some light on the situation; we want the most objective view possible. That is something we can do, something we can call for, and we can ensure that the investigation is truly independent. We want to know what role the military, the police, have played in this drama and ensure that we understand the scope of the situation. We feel that this is a first step in defending freedom of religion and ensuring that the discrimination and violence in Egypt end as quickly as possible.

Nevertheless, allow me to share my concerns. In 2008, a non-partisan democracy promotion agency was promised. Such an organization has yet to be created. Last year, an ambassador was sent to visit, take a certain stand and share our disagreement with the violence that was occurring in Egypt. One year later, this situation has clearly not been resolved. Now, we are taking a stand, we are making statements and we are demanding an investigation. That is promising. What we have heard tonight brings a lot of hope. However, what I truly hope is that the words that have been spoken and the stands that have been taken do not stop there and that we will not still be saying that we are taking a certain stand and that we are demanding a certain investigation one, two or even five years down the road, but that we will have turned these good intentions, words, visits and investigations into action.

Things are happening and we all agree tonight, no matter what party we belong to, that they are unacceptable and we must take action. I hope these good intentions will turn into action very soon and as quickly as possible, in order to prevent these things from happening again. Whatever has been done so far is clearly not enough, or we would not be here talking about it this evening. What is the next step? I am not criticizing anyone, but I am appealing to all parties. I think we are all on the same wavelength here this evening, or almost. I hope that this will continue and that we will work together in order to really improve the lives of those people who are looking outside their country and hoping for help from all sides.

In closing, I hope that our country, which we can be so proud of, will be able to take a stand and influence the situation in Egypt. I also truly hope that an election will be held soon and that we somehow do our part to ensure that the election takes place democratically. The entire population, including women of course, must be able to participate fully.

Thank you for having tonight's debate and thank you for everything that has been said. I hope we will not still be discussing

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this a year from now, but rather that progress will have been made because we have taken a real stand and real action.

• (2155)

[English]

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for her very passionate and eloquent speech. It was very well done, and she has expressed much of what all of us feel in knowing that these issues are going to be addressed.

I was at the meeting at the end of September for the establishment of the office of religious freedoms. Over 100 groups were in attendance at that meeting, including people from the Coptic community. The focus of that office, as established by our government, says that we are going to focus on advocacy, analysis, policy developments and programs related to protecting and advocating on behalf of religious minorities under threat, opposing religious hatred and promoting Canadian values of pluralism and tolerance abroad.

Could the member comment on how she sees those being worked into the issue of addressing concerns for the Coptic community?

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member.

It is great that she is reminding us that many things have already been done by the government and by all the parties together to try to take a stand and develop tools. Now, we clearly all agree that it is not enough and that we have to go further. I think we should take the time, a bit like we are this evening, to sit down together and put aside our partisan differences. This will enable us to talk about how we can integrate what we hope to do with what has already been done and with the expectations and demands of the people who are currently victims of discrimination.

We have to work together practically. We may not come up with an answer within a few minutes, but we might if we truly work together. We have to continue down the same path and make sure we get results.

[English]

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this a great and very important subject. We have members from all parties here, and I am just saddened that the Conservative Party has very few members here.

Does the member agree or disagree that this office that has been set up by the Conservatives is an office of smoke and mirrors, with not enough money and not enough teeth, and that it certainly will not be able to do anything?

I am willing to listen to her answer. The three members from the Conservative Party might even tune in.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member.

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I get the impression that I have to keep repeating what I have already said. Indeed, intentions have been expressed. Indeed, the positions have been presented verbally. Indeed, a few little things have been done. That being said, it is not enough because if it were, we would not be here this evening. We would not be debating this issue.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

[English]

The Chair: Order. The member for Scarborough—Agincourt needs to come to order. The parliamentary secretary needs to come to order.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, that concludes my response. We truly hope to see more concrete actions. I have hope. We will watch each other very closely to ensure that this takes a concrete form, and we will not settle for what has already been done; we will go much further and respond to this emergency.

[English]

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for a very passionate and well-put-together speech.

Often when we talk about conflict and persecution, we get caught up with the technicalities and the big picture. My colleague has dealt with children. I want her to talk a little bit about the kinds of impacts this kind of persecution has on children and the kinds of systemic problems it can create, which really point to the imperative nature of our finding a solution to end this persecution.

• (2200)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her question.

Yes, I used to be a teacher, and what I can tell you about it is that the feeling of belonging to a group that is strong and proud, to what you are and to the culture to which you are attached is hugely important. Obviously this is true for people of all ages, but it is particularly true for children. It does not take extensive studies to see that if you feel that there is nothing in place in your country, you cannot get any help and you cannot be proud of who you really are, that can have repercussions on children and therefore on tomorrow's society. When the children grow up they will be the leaders of that community.

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was just Googling the Coptic Christian efforts, and it was nice to see that we have churches here in Canada, in fact in Mississauga, where they are interested in what politicians have to say in regard to this issue.

This evening we are having a good, healthy, challenging debate, and it is nice to see that it goes beyond what is taking place here inside the House. It is also being debated in churches, communities and homes. It is clear that Canadians of all political stripes and different ethnic groups are keeping in tune with a very important issue.

I would like the member's comments on not only the importance of our taking action inside this chamber but also on our continuing to encourage broader education on the importance of picking up the fight and doing the things that are important. Examples would be for the Prime Minister to talk directly to the Egyptian ambassador here, and for people to make calls and write letters to provide support in whatever way we can, including our prayers and so forth, for those Christians who are—

The Speaker: I have to stop the member there to allow the hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard a chance to respond.

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his comment. The reason we are holding a debate so late tonight, which we will hold for as long as possible, is to focus attention on what is happening, the discussions being held and the commitments being made this evening. As many Canadians as possible have to know that tonight the government is calling for an investigation and we are debating it, that all parties agree that we must not only talk about it, we must take action and make demands. We hope everyone will observe the conduct of the country in the next few days, the next few weeks, and will not stand for inaction. We hope this debate will enable people to encourage the government to do that and to applaud it once it has.

It is important to take a stand for the Egyptian Coptic population and for all cultural minorities that may be victims of discrimination. We will not delude ourselves. Discrimination is not going to be completely eliminated from the world because we are taking a stand today on a particular situation. We have to act now, concerning this situation, but our international policies also have to provide that we will fight for freedom of religion and freedom from discrimination.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, the Egyptian government, in response to international horror at the attacks on Coptic Christians, has passed a law that makes a crime of religious discrimination or discrimination on the basis of gender or nationality, yet I think we all remain very skeptical that this would be anywhere near enough to protect the lives of Coptic Christians in a systemic response of increased religious intolerance.

I ask my hon. friend, the member for Pierrefonds—Dollard, what more can we demand of the new government in Egypt?

I hope she would agree with me that we should demand that international observers be present in the elections as they take place.

• (2205)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the hon. member. Our demands, our calls for an investigation and our public stance are a first step. Undoubtedly, much more needs to be done and other questions need to be raised about our role in similar international situations and the role we will actually play.

Now, this will not happen in the 30 seconds I have left, unfortunately, but since there seems to be a consensus tonight, I imagine that we will be able to sit down together, in a non-partisan fashion, and advance a cause that is obviously important to us.

[English]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as Egypt felt the warmth of the Arab spring, the Coptic Christians of that land felt an ever colder and darker winter setting in. Let us recount the recent events of the Coptic experience in Egypt.

On October 9, 2011, around 25 people were killed and more than 300 were injured at a protest against attacks on churches in Egypt. The violence appeared to include army gunfire against civilians.

On September 30, 2011, violence against Christians erupted in the village of al Marinab in the southern part of the country. After a group of thugs attempted to demolish a church, they faced protest and turned their attention to the victims, the Christians of that community. Residents then attacked local Christian-owned shops.

On March 5, 2011, a mob attacked Christian homes and set fire to the Coptic Church of St. Mina and St. George.

On January 1, 2011, at least 21 people were murdered and more than 70 were injured in a bombing in Alexandria. This happened just outside a Christian church as worshippers were leaving a New Year's service.

On January 7, 2010, seven people were killed in a drive-by shooting outside a church in the southern town of Nag Hammadi, after a Coptic Christmas eve mass.

These are but a few examples of the many odious crimes that have been systematically carried out against the Christian minority in Egypt.

Why should we care? After all, we are here and they are there. Why is it our problem? We should care because these attacks strike at the heart of the ancient liberty of freedom of religion.

As I have travelled the world and seen the experiences of other lands, I have learned the degree to which we are blessed to live in one of the freest nations on earth. For reasons unknown to us, we in this chamber and across the country were born in this land of liberty. However, liberty is not a gift to be jealously guarded for oneself, but rather to be shared with the peoples of the world near and far.

In quoting J.F.K.'s inaugural address in 1961, he said:

And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe—the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

These rights coming from the hand of God and not from the generosity of any state are the birthright of every man and woman around the world. It follows that we who are blessed to possess them must do our best to extend them to those who are not.

What have we done? In May 2009, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration met with key civil leaders, including Coptic Pope Shenouda III in Egypt.

On January 7, 2010, Canada condemned the attacks on Coptic Christians in Nag Hammadi.

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On January 1, 2011, Canada condemned the attacks on a Coptic Church in Alexandria, Egypt.

On February 23, 2011, there were statements by then-minister Cannon on Egypt and the rights of Coptic Christians right here in this chamber.

On March 15, 2011, then-minister Cannon again speaks out, but this time does so in a visit to Egypt.

On May 26, 2011, at the G8 in Deauville, there is a declaration on the right to practise religious faith in safety and security without fear of violence and oppression. Fundamental freedoms and rule of law are highlighted.

On September 26, 2011, the present Minister of Foreign Affairs addresses the United Nations General Assembly making specific reference to the Egyptian Coptic Christians.

•(2210)

In October 2011, the same minister releases a tough statement on the situation in Egypt.

In October 2011, the House passes a motion proposed by the present Minister of Foreign Affairs condemning the vicious attacks on Egyptian Coptic Christians and their institutions.

This gift of religious freedom with which we are blessed in this country was handed down to us by visionary leaders like Macdonald and Laurier at the time of our founding when they rejected sectarianism and ethnic religious violence. Our government understands that these gifts that were passed down to us from our ancestors but handed to our land from the hand of God, as President Kennedy put it, are gifts which we must do our best to share with the peoples of the world.

I will quote another great prime minister and former occupant of the House, the author of Canada's Bill of Rights, one of the first legislative enactments to enshrine in statute the values about which we are speaking tonight and which we hope will be extended to people around the world. The right hon. Prime Minister Diefenbaker said:

I am a Canadian, free to speak without fear, free to worship in my own way, free to stand for what I think right, free to oppose what I believe wrong, or free to choose those who shall govern my country. This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and all mankind.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while the events of the recent past have been adequately relayed by the hon. member, what most people are interested in, what I am interested in, what the Coptic Christian community is most interested in right now is specifically what action the Government of Canada is going to conduct to prevent the atrocities which have been well documented in recent history and by the hon. member. What specific action will the government be conducting to ensure that they cease and desist?

These people are very important. They have faced unbelievable circumstances, circumstances which are beyond contemplation by any of us here in Canada, except those who extend the hand of trust and faith within the Coptic community who are now imparting upon us a knowledge and understanding and appreciation, begging us for compassion and decency.

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In a world where there is a duty to protect, does the Government of Canada have a specific action plan, beyond words, that would entail interventions of some specific variety which the government could relay to the Coptic Christian community?

• (2215)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, it is important that we as supporters of religious freedom convert words into action. Actions have been taken by this government. I have listed nine specific steps our government has already taken in addressing the persecution of the Coptic Christian religious minority in Egypt.

Beyond those nine steps which have happened in Canada, in Egypt, at the United Nations and around the world, we have also begun the process of setting up an office of religious freedom. It will have as its mandate to promote the values that we cherish in this chamber and which are of particular importance to the Coptic minority being persecuted now in Egypt. This is due to the good work of the hon. member for Mississauga—Erindale, who is the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. It is great to have him participating in this debate this evening. We will work with him, with the minister, with our entire government to make religious freedom a paramount, central, guiding principle of our foreign policy put into operation by this new office.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his interventions earlier. It shows a clear interest in having a non-partisan approach to resolving issues.

I think we all agree in this House that every step we are taking toward peace in Egypt will have an impact. All of the steps the government is proposing will certainly lead us toward a solution.

There was one aspect that seemed to be omitted in his list of things with which he is willing to go forward. Back in 2008, the Conservative government in its throne speech promised it would set up a non-partisan democracy promotion agency. I am wondering how the government is planning on integrating that within its proposed solutions which it brought forward to the House today.

If we stress the non-partisan part of this series of solutions that we are proposing today, expeditious actions by the House will be much more assured. Although there are several options the government has proposed, I am curious as to why that one in particular, which is so clearly non-partisan, was omitted.

I am wondering if the member could address that particular issue and how that could be integrated within the solutions that we are looking at today toward a peaceful resolution of what is going on in Egypt.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, the establishment of democracy promotion as a principle of our government happened the day we took office. It happens in the way we execute our foreign policy every single day.

This was the first government in the world, for example, to cut off aid funds to the Hamas regime in Gaza. We have been consistent supporters of the democratic state of Israel in the Middle East. We have stood for democracy in Afghanistan by helping the people of that country defeat the Taliban and its terrorist enterprise so that Afghanistan would be governed by an administration elected by the people.

We have supported the people of Haiti in their hour of need, not only to rebuild their physical infrastructure and their social requirements in the aftermath of the terrible devastation, but also to rebuild their government.

The people of Libya are also thankful for the intervention by the Government of Canada through our air power to help defeat the Gaddafi regime and bring about a transition toward a democratic state.

These are tangible achievements for democracy where our children will be able to open textbooks in civics class and look back upon what this generation did to enhance democracy around the world.

By the way, I think all of us agree that no one in this chamber should take credit for the vast majority of those deeds. They were undertaken by the most courageous Canadians, those who put on the uniform and put their lives on the line in order to advance democracy around the world. We in this government are very proud to support them, and we will continue to work toward the promotion of democracy around the world.

• (2220)

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was very pleased to hear my hon. colleague repeat that quote from John Diefenbaker. I actually have that on my BlackBerry that I carry with me. Whenever new Canadians come into Newmarket—Aurora, I always provide that to my new Canadian constituents.

The particular statement that I find very moving is the one that says, “This heritage of freedom I pledge to uphold for myself and mankind”.

I wonder if my hon. colleague could speak to how that part of that statement is being woven into our foreign affairs philosophy and how particularly it will impact the Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Speaker, this is a tradition that predates any living member of this chamber. It is a tradition that goes back to our participation in the great wars; our efforts to defeat Nazism and fascism in Europe; our support for freedom against communism in Korea; the courageous leadership of the Mulroney government in helping to bring down apartheid in South Africa; the intervention of Canadian soldiers to fight in the most dangerous place on the planet earth, in Kandahar province, and help defeat the Taliban and install a burgeoning democracy in Afghanistan; and most recently, the successful coordinated efforts to overturn the Gadhafi regime in Libya in the hopes that country will continue a transition toward democracy.

These are concrete Canadian steps that have existed over long periods of time, generations, that have expanded freedom. There are people on this earth who owe their freedom to the courage of Canadian soldiers, and there are children who will be born into this land who will read about that courage and about its positive consequences many years from now, so that our generation will be able to justify its place in its time.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to share my time with the member for Scarborough—Guildwood.

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The debate has gone on for some time, it is coming close to an end, and it has become clear that there are certain points on which we seem to be all agreed and others on which we may not agree. I would like to use my time to talk about where we seem to agree on facts, where we are unanimous in agreeing on certain actions that should be taken, but what we may not agree on is whether this is all just words or whether the government is actually doing something to help resolve the situation. My impression is that it is mainly just words and I ask where is the beef.

Before I get to that point, obviously we agree that we deplore the frequent atrocities against the Coptic Christians. Just to mention a few, on January 6, 2010, seven were killed; on January 1, 2011, 23 were killed in front of a Coptic church in Alexandria; and most recently, on October 9, 2011, 25 Coptic Christians were killed, more than 300 were injured and there is evidence of military gunfire being present. There is no disputing those facts, and I have only mentioned a few of the cases.

We all condemn these acts. That is obvious. All of us would call for an investigation into the tragedy of October 9, an investigation that is ordered by the United Nations and clearly independent of the Egyptian military. We all would agree that there should be independent observers at the upcoming Egyptian election. I would be astounded if the motion now before the House did not pass unanimously.

It is not a great achievement to be in agreement on the things I have just listed, because I would imagine that 99% of Canadians would agree with all of that. I believe any reasonable person would agree with the list of recommendations I just described. Therefore, the issue is not whether we agree with these things. The issue is whether the Government of Canada can do anything effective to help bring about these improvements we all want.

We can pass this motion and maybe it will get some attention in the Canadian media, but if that is all that happens, it will not have any impact at all on what happens in Egypt. I am skeptical that the government is doing anything significant to actually help the situation. The previous member said that the Canadian government condemns massacre. What does he expect the Canadian government to do? Any government in the world, except maybe the government of Saddam Hussein or Gadhafi, would condemn a massacre. What does that do? In and of itself, it does not do anything.

I am a bit skeptical, too, about this office for religious freedom. It has a budget of \$5 million. That might sound like a lot of money, but in a \$200 billion government that is small potatoes and, as one of my colleagues said, it might fund a few staff, a few visits and a few studies, but the associate defence minister said this little office could call up the United Nations and get action. That makes no sense. The person who should call up the Secretary-General of the United Nations is the Prime Minister. The other agency that should be contacted is the United Nations Human Rights Commission. We have evidence from a meeting two days ago in a foreign affairs committee that an official said he or she had no knowledge of any such communication.

We can pass all the motions we like, but if they stay in Canada and if the leaders of this country, the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, do not get on the phone and speak to those who

might actually effect real change, then it is just talk. Effectively, we all have good intentions, but unless those real actions are taken, then nothing real will happen and that is my concern.

•(2225)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I put this question to the member with some trepidation because I try to maintain as much as possible a non-partisan approach, in particular when we are so unified. But I am wondering what kind of influence we have with the new government of Egypt. We did not play a role in encouraging Cairo Spring. I remember that I was the only leader of any of the parties who said that we should pressure Hosni Mubarak to resign. When he was toppled, the first comment by our Prime Minister was “I guess you can’t get the toothpaste back in the tube”.

There was no sense that we were building a strong relationship with that new government. I wonder if the member has a sense that we are building that now. Again, I apologize for bringing back what the Prime Minister’s comments were at the time. We certainly took a lead in Libya, but in Egypt we did not. I am wondering if the hon. member thinks that will affect our ability to influence the government to protect the lives of Coptic Christians.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, my colleague has a really good point. I had forgotten about that, but I do remember that comment by the Prime Minister back then that “you can’t put the toothpaste back in the tube”. It hardly seemed an enthusiastic endorsement of the Arab Spring in Egypt. I seem to remember our leader was a little more positive than that, but the Prime Minister is the one who really counts in foreign relations.

One cannot undo what happened in history, but clearly that comment and the lack of enthusiasm that he displayed would not be a positive in our ability to exert influence on Egypt. But we have to work with what we have and do our best even where we are.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to something the member raised in his comments and several other members have raised, and that is with respect to the preliminary budget for the office of religious freedoms. The \$5 million has been quoted, and I need to tell them two things. One is that it is our hope and expectation that 90% of that \$5 million annual budget will be used for programs to protect religious minorities around the world, including Coptic Christians in Egypt.

Second, I would think he would know because he is a wise man, that the U.S. office of religious freedoms has an annual budget of \$10 million and the size of the U.S. economy is roughly 10 times the size of the Canadian economy. Typically any Canadian organization would be about one-tenth of the size. We have already gone five times beyond that, but that is the starting budget. We are working with religious communities across Canada to decide what kinds of programs will actually be effective in protecting religious freedoms around the world.

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The member was a minister in a government that ruled this country from 1993 to 2006. The U.S. office of religious freedoms was created in 1998. I would like him to explain to the House why Liberals did not create this office of religious freedoms to protect the Copts—

•(2230)

The Speaker: I am going to have to stop the parliamentary secretary to allow the member for Markham—Unionville a chance to respond.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I expect the reason why the U.S. budget is only \$10 million is because, as we heard before, under Barack Obama they slashed the massive budget of George Bush because his office of religious freedom used it as a Republican hiring tool, we were told.

I know a little bit about money and economics, and the member says that \$5 million will be used for programs to defend religions around the world. Come on, it is going to cost a few million dollars just for the bureaucrats and the travel, and we are left with say \$2 million for programs to defend religions around the world, like about five of them. This does not add up.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have been sitting here for a few hours now and the last thing Canadians want to see is partisan sniping or politicians fighting in a church over a microphone for the right to speak or such actions like that.

Canadians want to see concrete actions on the international scene to improve the situation. What would those concrete actions be that all three parties should take to improve this situation?

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the comment that we should not be too partisan. I did not think I was being too partisan. I gave a long list of the points on which we agreed, and I expressed skepticism that anything real would come out of this. This is an honest approach, and I have not heard much evidence that there is much meat coming out of this.

In terms of the impact of this office of religious freedom, I would estimate that the two visits that my colleague from Mount Royal made to Egypt when he was minister of justice would do a lot more than this office of religious—

The Speaker: Order. I will have to stop the hon. member there as his time for questions and comments has expired.

The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, resuming debate.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been an interesting debate. I commend the member for Scarborough—Agincourt for his effort in bringing this debate to the floor of the House. It is an important debate and it is a debate that is timely. I appreciate his efforts, both on the floor of the House and elsewhere. It has been a significant effort to bring this debate forward so that it is in the minds of Canadians and in the mind of the government.

We have watched the Arab Spring with various degrees of enthusiasm, trepidation and discouragement. We have watched people from Tunisia and Yemen embrace a desire for freedom and accountable government.

Canada has contributed in its own small way to the yearnings to throw off the yoke of oppression of a madman in Libya. We can only hope that the people of Libya will not descend into chaos that is worse than before. It was also encouraging to see elections take place in Tunisia.

How all this shakes down is probably anybody's guess. However, we do have a tremendous advantage here in Canada, in that we have diaspora from pretty well all over the world and those diaspora can, in many instances, inform us as politicians and also inform the government and give us a tremendous advantage as to how to interpret the events that are happening in the various countries.

That brings me to Egypt. Egypt is easily the largest and most important of the Arab countries. It has had a glorious past and it may yet have a glorious future. However, for many decades, it has wallowed in a state of despair and despondency which has really never let it take its rightful place in the community of nations.

Just a few months ago, Coptic Christians and Muslims stood shoulder to shoulder to throw off the Mubarak yoke. Unfortunately, that unity of purpose and hope has been fractured by the abuse of some Islamist elements that have used this time of turmoil to settle ancient grievances and assert a form of Islam repugnant to the legitimate aspirations of those Egyptians who risked their lives for freedom.

Equally unfortunate has been the wilfully blind attitude of the military to the abuses of minorities, particularly the Copts.

As the sole remaining protection of the security and rights of all Egyptians, the army has been missing in action. Television images of wilful destruction of churches and abuse of worshippers reflects very poorly on the military. The protection of minority rights and religious freedom should be, if it is not already, a core value of the military and those who aspire to lead the country.

One would have hoped that the army would have been Egypt's guarantor of security as Egypt transitions to an accountable post-Mubarak government.

The treatment of the Coptic Christians will be a litmus test for Egypt's success. If the abuse of people and the destruction of property continues, Egypt will fail. The Arab Spring will become an Arab winter in Egypt and the people will return to a new era of despair and despondency that will look a lot like the old era of despair and despondency.

For those who support the religious persecution of this minority, I say, "You are destroying Egypt's lone chance of success". It is the ultimate in self-limitation. If Egypt does not treat the Copts with dignity, respect and the rule of law, Egypt will fail. No country in the world can prosper if its minorities do not also prosper.

Sri Lanka is a classic example. Sri Lanka has had a low grade civil war for several generations. In 2009, the conflict came to an end without justice for the Tamils. If there is no justice and respect for the religious and ethnic minorities, as it has debilitated Sri Lanka for literally generations, it will also debilitate Egypt.

Government Orders

• (2235)

There is no doubt that Egypt will face serious challenges regardless, but it will inevitably handicap itself if it fails to respect and protect the Coptic minority. The best traditions of ancient Islam protected and encouraged minorities.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the member is very passionate about the protection of religious freedoms. I have had a chance to serve with him on committees and appear with him on panels. I know that this is an issue that is very close to his heart.

Given his background in the protection of religious freedoms and human rights, I wonder if he could give us some guidance on how the world, the international community and perhaps even individual Canadians can encourage and hold the new Egyptian government to account to ensure that their new constitution and their actual actions protect the rights of religious minorities of all kinds, including the Coptic people in the future democratically elected state of Egypt.

• (2240)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, Canada actually has a huge advantage over many other countries.

I was just talking to someone and saying that there are something in the order of 20,000 Coptic Christians in the Mississauga area. There is an enormous advantage and an enormous opportunity to use that group of people to speak to the community of Egypt. They can speak with a voice that is probably far more powerful than any voice that could be asserted from here.

Nevertheless, they would expect and would hope for some support from their government as they try to influence and shape the debate in Egypt. Indeed, if we have installed a new ambassador there, I would hope that he would take advantage of the opportunity, when he speaks with those who aspire to lead Egypt, to tell them the values that Canada holds dear and that first and foremost is the freedom to practice one's religion. We would expect that the Copt minority be protected and allowed to prosper.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, mine is more of a comment than a question.

This past summer, I had the occasion to attend a speech given by the ambassador from Egypt at the embassy. It was rather an uplifting speech, where the ambassador said that his country had quite a bit of work to do and would hope to inspire itself from some lessons learned in Canada, one being our democratic system. The other perhaps being how we handle diversity.

That got me to thinking. One of the aspects of diversity, of course, is diversity in religious beliefs and the pluralism that necessitates. We have, in the riding that I have the honour of representing, St. George and St. Anthony Coptic Orthodox Church. We have the St. Peter and Paul Melkite Catholic Church. We have Anglican churches and Presbyterian churches. We even have the East Gate Alliance Church, where the Prime Minister attends from time to time. We have Roman Catholic churches, mosques and synagogues.

We have another institution that I hope would be involved in some of the debates that will flow from tonight and that is the Global Centre for Pluralism which our government started and the current government completed, and I recognize that, and which is headed by

the Aga Khan. I think there is a lot to be learned there and a lot to be applied, not only in Canada but around the world, and certainly in Egypt.

The wealth of pluralism, whether it be a religious pluralism, linguistic pluralism or cultural pluralism, Canada has demonstrated that we are a beacon in that. I would hope that all of the factions in Egypt currently would inspire themselves from that kind of behaviour.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is absolutely correct. Those who embrace pluralism do win. Those who distance themselves from pluralism lose. It is that simple.

At this point, Egypt appears to be pushing pluralism away. It wants a monolithic religious experience in that country. There are several potential consequences of that. The best and the brightest will always leave and that is a tremendous drain on the nation. Or, there will be kind of a low grade terrorism that goes on where Egypt will use up all its resources providing security to its people. Or, there will be some form of sectarian strife that goes on and on. We have seen countries that have emerged from sectarian strife, such as Ireland in the past few years, and prosperity comes.

Egypt has a choice. It can embrace diversity or it can shun diversity. If it embraces, it wins. If it shuns, it loses.

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to stand this evening and speak to the issue of ongoing violence and vicious attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt, a subject that has received considerable attention in this House in recent weeks.

On October 17, the House adopted a motion condemning attacks against Coptic Christians in Egypt and called on the Egyptian government to ensure that the perpetrators of those attacks bear the full weight of the law. The strong and unequivocal language in that motion highlights how important this issue is to all members on this side of the House and to all Canadians.

The promotion and protection of human rights and the rule of law is an integral part of our country's foreign policy. As Canadians, we enjoy the freedom to believe and the ability to express those beliefs without retribution.

It is worth noting that Canada's strong relations with Egypt are based on significant people-to-people ties and growing bilateral trade and investment links. For example, it is estimated that some 55,000 Canadians have roots in Egypt, some 100,000 Canadians travel there every year, and Egypt imports some \$630 million in goods and services from Canada. This relationship gives us the right to be open and direct with Egypt and we have expressed our desire to see tangible evidence of transition to democracy, as well as to express our concerns about rising sectarian tensions.

Members will recall that there was an attack on Coptic Christians leaving a Christmas mass in Nag Hammadi in January 2010, as well as a bombing of a church in Alexandria during the celebration of a New Year's mass earlier this year, both of which Canada condemned in the strongest terms. I spoke with our Coptic brothers and sisters and mourned those tragedies.

Government Orders

Last Christmas, I and many members of Parliament went to Christmas mass at many Coptic churches across Canada to celebrate the holiday despite the threats that had been issued against Coptic churches in Canada.

The Prime Minister and the hon. Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism visited the Coptic community at St. Mary's church in Mississauga to listen to their concerns and then to express support for these great Canadians.

More recently, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing his deep concern and calling on Egypt to ensure freedom of religion and to protect religious rights. At the minister's request, Canada's chargé d'affaires met with Bishop Youannes, general bishop and private secretary to His Holiness Pope Shenouda III, at St. Mark's Cathedral to express Canada's concern and support. The Minister of Foreign Affairs had also requested that Canada's ambassador to Egypt discuss previous attacks with the Pope.

The chargé d'affaires also provided the bishop with a copy of the resolution adopted by the House of Commons that condemns the attacks. It calls on the Egyptian government to bring the perpetrators to justice and asks the UN Human Rights Council to conduct an investigation into the plight of Egyptian Coptic Christians and issue a public report of its findings.

Indeed, the Minister of Foreign Affairs also made reference to the situation of Coptic Christians during his address at the United Nations General Assembly, as well as during public consultations related to the new office of religious freedom on October 3, 2011.

Egypt is entering a pivotal period in its transition to democratic governance and this significance cannot be overstated. It is the country with the largest population in the Arab world. In fact, one out of four people from Arab countries is Egyptian. It is a nation with an ancient civilization and a vibrant and rich culture that has long been a moderate leader of the Arab, African and Muslim worlds. It has a long history of religious diversity and tolerance. What happens in Egypt has important implications for other countries of the region, for the world economy and for international security, including the security of Canadians.

In the context of the Arab Awakening, the outcome in Egypt has the potential to affect the transitions under way in other countries. The developments in Egypt over the coming months and years will shape the region and the world as we know it. Canada's hope for Egypt is that its transition continues to be based on a clear desire of Egyptians for respect for human rights, the rule of law and the protection of religious freedoms. Canada stands by the people of Egypt, including the Coptic community, as they work toward a peaceful and democratic transition.

As the Minister of Foreign Affairs recently stated in his address to the United Nations General Assembly, "the long history of humanity has proven that religious freedom and democratic freedom are inseparable."

We cannot ignore the numerous attacks against the Coptic community in Egypt, including the most recent attack on October 9 in Cairo between Egyptian security forces and Coptic Christian protesters. Twenty-seven people, mostly Coptic Christians, were

killed and over 300 were injured in that tragic event. This was the most violent incident since the fall of the former regime.

Immediately following that incident, the Minister of Foreign Affairs issued a statement expressing our concern and urging "all involved to work together to build a society where religious communities can live and prosper together and build a new Egypt". Furthermore, we called for a transparent investigation into the violence and for those responsible to be held accountable.

•(2245)

We have seen positive steps by the government of Egypt to address tensions. For instance, since the events of October 9, the government of Egypt has committed to conduct a full investigation into the clashes and to bring to justice the instigators and perpetrators of the violence. An investigation is also under way into the destruction of the church into the village of al-Marinab in early October, which led members of the Coptic community to protest on October 9.

We will continue to monitor the situation. The Department of Foreign Affairs has made numerous representations to the government of Egypt about the importance of promoting and protecting human rights, including those of the Coptic Christians. These representations have been made in Cairo by the Canadian embassy, in Ottawa through the Egyptian embassy, at bilateral meetings between Canadian and Egyptian officials and at the United Nations.

Looking ahead, we recognize that Egypt's future must be charted by the Egyptian people themselves. The best way to accomplish that is through peaceful, orderly, political and economic reforms that enable all Egyptians to participate in the process and that allow the opportunity for dialogue with all parties.

We recognize that there are considerable challenges going forward as Egyptians work to define the foundations of a new Egypt. This is to be expected as Egyptians seek to find new common ground and define the nature of their society and their government going forward. One of the greatest challenges for Egyptians will be to continue to work together to build a strong culture of respect for pluralism and human rights, including religious freedom.

Even with laws in place to prevent discrimination, the importance of strong social norms that make it unacceptable to discriminate on the basis of religion cannot be understated. This will be a long-term process, the road may be occasionally rocky and we urge the government of Egypt to fully implement the measures to which it has committed.

We have and will continue to be clear on this point. The protection of Egyptians against all forms of extremism during the upcoming election period is vital to ensure that religious minorities are free to play a meaningful role in the political transition.

As I have noted, Coptic Christians have been an integral part of Egyptian society for many centuries and today the overwhelming majority of Egyptians support religious tolerance.

We continue to urge the Egyptian people to sustain their long history of tolerance and peaceful co-existence. Rest assured that the Government of Canada will be watching.

Government Orders

• (2250)

[Translation]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to date, Canada has had a very well earned reputation for its peaceful role in international peacekeeping. Today we talked about a number of measures that the government has already put in place to try to improve the situation in Egypt. However, we can see that the situation has not improved enough. On the contrary, discriminatory actions are still taking place and it is high time they stopped. I would like to have some hope. Many things have been done, but it is clearly not enough.

Does the hon. member agree that what is being done so far about the situation in Egypt is not enough? If so, what more does he think should be done to achieve real change?

[English]

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, Canada has done everything in its power to help alleviate the situation in Egypt. We engage very closely with the Coptic diaspora in Canada. The member for Mississauga—Erindale is a leader on this side of the House in working with that community. We have engaged with 30 Coptic clerics last Friday to help find solutions toward this.

Our diplomatic corps, our ministers, our Prime Minister have stated unequivocally their opposition to religious intolerance, violence and persecution in that country. We will continue to do that.

As I said in my speech, the road will remain rocky. There is a long path to this sort of peace, but we will continue to work very hard and apply lessons learned from other places that Canada has worked very hard to instill freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We will continue to do so in Egypt as well.

Hon. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have exhausted about four hours in the debate. Thousands of people are tuning in to watch. We had a great representation from the Coptic community here tonight from all across Canada. Members on all sides of the House participated. It was a vibrant debate.

This is due to what is happening in Egypt. The world is watching. The people of Canada are watching. It is not only the Coptic Christians in Canada; the entire nation is watching how we will respond and what is happening.

I listened with great interest to members of the government rhyme off dates and I heard the statements that ministers made and everything else. I am sure that the hon. member and everybody else agree that we can condemn the situation and we can probably call the ambassador of the country about our displeasure, but overall the United Nations and the UNHCR are the organizations that we as citizens of this world have to address this issue, and we have to make it work.

The minister was there in September and made some comments, but we have not yet addressed the issue of what happened on October 9. We have yet to take it to task and address it. A couple of months down the line, this might reoccur. It will not stop. I pray that it does, but it will not. It has happened continuously, yet we will say we failed.

My question to the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre is this: will he make a commitment tonight that when caucus meets next Wednesday, government members will speak to the Prime Minister and encourage the Prime Minister to pick up the phone and call Ban Ki-moon to tell him that enough is enough and we will not tolerate this anymore—

• (2255)

The Speaker: Order. I have to stop the member there to allow the member for Etobicoke Centre a chance to respond.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, we were the first country to call for an inquiry at the UN and we continue to do that through diplomatic means. The Prime Minister, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and, indeed, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs need take no lessons from anybody on their engagement with the Coptic community. We have worked very closely with them. We have engaged them time and time again. The door remains open. Constructive dialogue is always our mantra, and that is what we will continue to do.

Mr. Bob Dechert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Etobicoke Centre for his very thorough analysis of the plight of Coptic Christians.

People should know that before the hon. member was elected to Parliament, in his previous occupation he worked very closely and tirelessly with the Coptic community in the Greater Toronto Area. He is well known to that community. He met with it on numerous occasions and listened to Coptic Christians' concerns. He heard about the atrocities and intervened with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism and other members of the Government of Canada to address the concerns of the Coptic community.

Perhaps he could share with us what he learned from members of that community and whether he thinks the office of religious freedom that the government has announced can help address some of those concerns.

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, the office of religious freedom will be an outstanding institution that this side of the House will bring into being. It is going to provide a voice for not only Coptic Christians but for all religious minorities and for all religions, period. Through this office they will be able to share their ideas, collaborate and work out differences in a very fair, diplomatic, open and transparent way. Canada is going to be a leader in that.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to finish by saying that what has happened here today is a step forward. We do not have all the solutions, but we have managed to shine the light and have a fairly respectful and robust debate about a very important issue that has international implications for what we believe our democracy to be, not only for us but for citizens around the world.

I want to thank Canadians who travelled here and sat through this lengthy debate with us. We thank them for their commitment and commit to them that we will carry on—

The Speaker: Order, please. I will have to stop the member there.

The hon. member for Etobicoke Centre has 15 seconds.

Government Orders

• (2300)

Mr. Ted Opitz: Mr. Speaker, this really is a non-partisan issue. We are highly concerned about the state of Coptic Christians in Egypt. Everybody on all sides of the House has the passion and the desire to see the intolerance and violence end and to see Egypt progress into the future to become a strong democratic state that respects the democratic values of freedom, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and justice for all.

The Speaker: It being 11 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 53(1) the committee will rise and I will leave the chair.

(Government Business No. 7 reported)

The Speaker: Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 11 p.m.)

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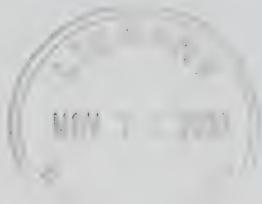
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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 039 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Friday, October 28, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, October 28, 2011

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed from October 27 consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine has nine minutes to finish his speech.

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be brief. I want to remind members of what I said yesterday about the bill before us, because the members who are here today may not have heard.

The gun registry protects women, cultural communities, gays and the disadvantaged in Canada. I cannot believe that the government actually wants to abolish it.

I would like to remind members why we have the gun registry. What motivated Quebecers and Canadians to create this registry? Members will recall that on December 6, 1989, 14 women were killed at the École Polytechnique in Montreal. I was there when it happened. I remember the vigil. I remember people's faces that night. They could not believe that 14 women were dead because a man felt emasculated. That is absolutely unbelievable.

I remember the faces of my colleagues that night. The shock, sadness and anger were obvious. I remember my many colleagues, the Montrealers who gathered at the École Polytechnique, the women who went to the Université de Montréal, the vigil where everyone was asking the same questions. Why? What happened? Did we understand correctly? Did Marc Lépine feel so emasculated that he had to kill 14 women?

Marc Lépine left a note that night. He wrote:

Know that I am committing suicide today 89/12/06 not for economic reasons...but rather for political reasons. I have decided to send feminists, who have done nothing but ruin my life, to their Maker—to the kingdom of the dead.

That event led to the creation of the registry we have today. We remember that before the registry was created, there was another massacre in Montreal. Valery Fabrikant killed four of his colleagues at Concordia University. I was there at that time as well. He killed four of his colleagues. Now they are dead. I want to repeat their names: department head Phoivos Ziogas; professors Matthew Douglas and Jaan Saber; and president of the teachers' union at Concordia University, Michael Hogben.

Mr. Fabrikant killed them because he felt he was not getting enough support from his colleagues. If the registry had been in place at that point, I have no doubt that those four people might be alive today. For weeks, Mr. Fabrikant had walked the halls of Concordia, perhaps with a rifle, and people suspected he was dangerous man. If police had had access to a gun registry that identified him as the owner of a firearm, I doubt that those people would be dead today.

The registry has its place. The government is removing the requirement to register non-restricted firearms. It is also fearmongering. It is clashing with a large part of the public and also with the police, who are responsible for ensuring public safety. This government brags about wanting to make people safe and sending criminals to jail, yet they are depriving law enforcement authorities of a valuable tool.

Last week, the head of the Montreal police officers' association, the Fraternité des policiers et policières, told us that of the 14 police officers killed recently, 12 were killed by long guns. The gun registry is useful. As of September 30, 2011, the Canadian gun registry was being used more than 17,000 times a day. In my riding of Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, police have said that they use the registry every day. Officers in the Sûreté du Québec consult the registry every time they respond to a situation such as death threats, assault, abuse and suicide attempts.

We will never be able to know the number of lives saved in the Gaspé because Sûreté du Québec or RCMP officers changed their method of intervention after consulting the registry. The Conservatives do not have a column for those figures.

Government Orders

What will Conservative members say to youth protection workers, paramedics and nurses? Will they apologize for putting their lives in danger as well? Likely not, since the government is dismissing their concerns like it is dismissing the opinions of victims groups, most of which continue to support the maintenance of the long gun registry. The government is adding insult to injury by destroying existing long gun registry records. This government, which was elected to represent all Canadians, is gambling with the safety of the public for partisan reasons.

As the official opposition, we have suggested other possibilities to the government. We made suggestions that would have allowed the Prime Minister and the members of his party to reach a compromise. We too want to respond to the concerns of aboriginal and rural communities, but we also want to ensure that the police have the tools they need to keep our communities safe.

In 2010, the NDP made several suggestions to alleviate the problems with the registry. Mr. Layton, who recently passed away, wanted to build bridges between urban and rural populations. He proposed decriminalizing the failure to register a firearm for first-time offenders. Previous versions of the bill allowed businesses to keep an inventory of the sale of long guns. This bill does not contain any such provisions. The government is rejecting these proposals; it prefers to pit urban Canada against rural Canada. Yet, stopping violence is a priority for both rural and urban Canadians. There is no good reason to explain the government's inflexibility.

A study by the National Institute of Public Health estimates that, in Quebec, over 2,000 lives have been saved since the implementation of the long gun registry. Furthermore, an average of one in three women who die at the hands of their husbands are shot. Most of these victims are killed with a legal shotgun or hunting rifle.

Why does the government want to reduce firearm tracking mechanisms on top of eliminating the registry? This bill also does not include any measures to ensure that firearms are transferred only to valid permit holders. The bill does not make any sense in any respect and goes against the values and requests of Canadians.

I call upon the Conservative members to regain their common sense and reverse their decision. Our future depends on it.

•(1010)

[English]

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member opposite, not surprisingly, just contradicted himself. He was trying to convince us that registering firearms would keep people from using them in violent crimes. He just said that many women were shot by their husbands with registered firearms. On the one hand, he is saying that the gun registry will stop this; on the other hand, he is saying that crimes are committed with registered firearms. Which is it? There is no evidence that registering a firearm will stop someone from committing a crime with it.

To have two positions on the same issue is quite confusing and that is probably why the NDP's continued support of this firearm registry is confusing because it does not have a particular position that is logical.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, the rate of murders in situations of conjugal violence since the registry has been put in place has

dropped by 50%. Innumerable lives have been saved with the registry. The fact that there continues to be violence in conjugal situations is unfortunate and I do not think we can claim that we will ever put a complete stop to it.

However, the registry has proven to be effective. It has reduced the number of murders in this country. We are pleased to see that the registry is used by police in order to defend women in situations where they are likely to be victims. I do not see any contradiction in thinking that \$4 million a year to save even one life is worth it.

•(1015)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in his famous dissertation on war, Sun Tzu said that the most important aspect of any military campaign is information. I believe he said that not to destroy the enemy, but rather to spare the enemy as much as possible and have a decisive victory. Clearly, the firearms registry is a crucial source of information for police officers, to protect not only their own lives, but also the lives of those close to any firearm owners who may be in crisis, and the lives of troubled firearm owners themselves.

After listening carefully to my esteemed colleague, I wonder if he could explain why the Conservative government wants to deprive our police officers of such an important information tool, one that could save many lives and prevent injuries?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments. They are very much appreciated.

I am having a really hard time understanding why the Conservatives refuse to take the viewpoint of police officers from across Canada into account. The Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and associations like the Montreal Police Brotherhood have told us over and over again that the registry is very useful and that it saves lives, including their own. They are the ones in danger on the front lines. They are there to protect us, and the Conservatives are telling them that their lives are not important enough to give them all the tools available to protect themselves. They are there to help the public in situations of domestic violence, as pointed out by my colleague across the floor, to help women who are in danger. Police officers have told us many times that the firearms registry is relevant and that it is worth keeping it at a cost of \$4 million a year.

I have a question for the Conservatives: how much is one life worth?

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the previous question by the hon. member opposite. He was wondering why we should have a firearms registry if it does not prevent certain crimes. However, during the debate on Bill C-10, the government used the opposite argument, saying that minimum sentences would help victims by preventing and deterring criminals from committing crimes.

Government Orders

I would like to know how the hon. member for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine sees this contradiction between the arguments the Conservatives seem determined to make about Bill C-10 and those it is currently making about the firearms registry.

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his comments. The contradiction is quite clear. They want to save \$4 million a year by scrapping the firearms registry, but they are going to spend an undetermined, exorbitant amount of money on opening new prisons across Canada. I understand this might create some jobs. I am happy for the guards. I used to be a teacher and I taught some of them; I tip my hat to them. However, why does the government want to build more prisons? In the meantime, it does not want to use the existing tools to save the lives of Canadians. Honestly, I do not understand this.

We have adequate tools. We do not need to burden the Criminal Code with new legislation that will impose harsher sentences on people who commit crimes. I do not see how a harsher sentence is going to save the life of a woman who is already dead. However, with the firearms registry, we can prevent that woman from being killed and prevent a trial. We can ensure that, in the case of a man who might fire a gun without thinking, the police will be there to intervene in a situation that would otherwise be, most unfortunately, fatal.

• (1020)

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, I will discuss another aspect of police work and demonstrate how useful the registry can be. When there is a hit and run accident involving a pedestrian or cyclist, we know very well that the information contained in the motor vehicle registry is a tremendous help to police in their investigation. A parallel can be drawn with the firearms registry. I imagine that the police use the registry as an additional investigative tool, an unlimited source of information, to piece together what happened and prove that the weapon in question is the one used in the crime. Of course, I am not familiar with all aspects of police work, but I imagine that the registry is very useful in their investigation and that it also helps protect officers' lives.

Should we not be providing tools for our police and not taking them away?

Mr. Philip Toone: Mr. Speaker, I thank my dear colleague for his comments. We must keep and even improve all tools available to the police. Our firearms registry has proven its worth. It could be improved. We are listening to what our police officers and all stakeholders have to say in order to improve the tools available.

This bill affects the most disadvantaged people, who feel attacked and targeted. We must take that into consideration. If we scrap the firearms registry, we will be endangering the lives of countless Canadians. That is unacceptable. Police officers are aware of this. They have told us many times that the registry must be kept in place. We want to save Canadians' lives. Scrapping the firearms registry will have the opposite effect. It will put the lives of people at risk, especially women, but also gay people and members of cultural communities. Almost all these people are wondering what is happening. We will pay a high price for the \$4 million a year in savings.

[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Cariboo—Prince George.

It is with considerable respect for the people of my riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke that I rise today to speak in support of this legislation that will finally scrap the long gun registry. Of all of the issues I am called upon to stand up for with regard to the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke no issue produces a more emotional reaction from constituents than the Liberal long gun registry. I am pleased to acknowledge the many farmers and hunters who have stood by my side on this issue. We never doubted that one day we would be successful. This legislation is their victory.

The issue has been a long road for me since I sat down for the first time at the Buckhorn restaurant in Calabogie and had all of the faults of Bill C-68, which is now referred to as the Liberal long gun registry, clearly explained to me in detail. For those members who have been on the front lines opposing the long gun registry in Parliament, our leader has always been the member for Yorkton—Melville in Saskatchewan, who is helped by his very capable assistant Dennis Young.

In 2003, the member for Yorkton—Melville shared the stage with me at a meeting held at the Renfrew Armouries where over 900 farmers and hunters came to show their support for our efforts to scrap the long gun registry. Some say that the meeting was so hot that the heat spilled over to the outside when a vehicle spontaneously burst into flames in the parking lot. All Canadians owe him a great debt of gratitude. On our behalf, we thank the member. The end to this odious registry is almost near and in no small part due to his efforts.

In my home riding I have been assisted in the fight for freedom and the right to own private property by people such as Donald Broome of Cobden, who has been one of the most articulate opponents of the Liberal long gun registry in my riding. Mr. Broome early on identified the highly undemocratic deficiencies of Bill C-68 that raised the ire of all reasonable Canadians. His treatise *The Nation of Sheep*, listed for publication the 11 violations of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms inherent in Bill C-68, such as the constitutional rights pertaining to unreasonable search and seizure, self-incrimination and to be presumed innocent until proven guilty.

Like Mr. Broome, people in my riding recognized that the opposition to Bill C-68 was about more than just the long gun registry. I sincerely thank Mr. Ron Wilson from Westmeath. Like Donald Broome, Ron Wilson's thoughtful analysis of the faults of the Liberal long gun registry was powerful ammunition to use against our detractors. Ron opposed misinformation from our opponents with facts so he never lost an argument.

Government Orders

I thank all of the members of the Pembroke Outdoor Sportsman's Club as well as all sportsmen in clubs across Renfrew County for their unwavering support. Their trust was well placed. Over the years many more would enlist in the fight to get rid of the Liberals and their long gun registry.

I also thank international champion marksman Scott Murray from Arnprior; Frank Green from Combermere; Al Groves and the recently deceased Carmen Greer from Beachburg; Larry Gaffney, who has also passed away, from Deep River; Calvin McLaughlin from Haley Station; Ray Brisebois from Chalk River; Ken O'day and our dearly departed Harry Haley from Eganville; Norm Lentz from Palmer Rapids; Ian Fidler from Petawawa; Stan Pecoskie and all of the members of the Renfrew County Private Landowners Association; Graham Faught, who we know as Fuzzy, from Pembroke; Phil Conway from Barry's Bay; the folks who run the Eganville gun show; Kellard Witt from Alice and Fraser, and Garnet Kranz from Killaloe. I hope Garnet does not think his number is going to be deleted from my speed dial because we still have much to do. I could go on and on.

•(1025)

On a very cold winter night, word went out that the Liberal long gun registry minister was making a visit to support a provincial candidate from my riding and from his party. A few phone calls later and in short order a welcoming committee of sportsmen was assembled outside the hall the minister was attending. They intended to make sure he got the message that they wanted the long gun registry scrapped.

For days afterwards I received calls from across eastern Ontario from disappointed hunters who would like to have joined the protest.

Sentiments against the Liberal long gun registry spread across rural Ontario. I can state without a doubt that the crescendo of the first campaign in which I was elected as the MP for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke was that night at an all candidates meeting at the Pembroke Outdoor Sportsman's Club. My opponent, who was the local representative for the Liberal long gun registry, told the packed crowd that had jammed into the meeting that the long gun registry would remain in effect so they had better get a life.

Everyone in the room that night and, as it would turn out, the majority of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke voters resolved to give the Liberal long gun registry and all its supporters a taste of defeat.

In a later election, on that very same stage when one of our country's finest veterans, George Tompkins, asked a question about the gun registry, the Liberal candidate told him he should move to Texas.

In a riding that had not voted Conservative in almost 70 years through the Diefenbaker and Mulroney sweeps, a beachhead of freedom, as it was characterized at the time, was established in Ontario in Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

Along with my colleague in the riding of Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, we represented a grassroots movement for private property rights that is now represented across the province and in the legislature of Ontario.

I am proud to confirm that the landowners' movement started in Renfrew county and spread across the province. Who knew of the role that would be played by a group of hunters and farmers, the rural people who built this country, who were fed up with big government telling them what they could and could not do or the pivotal role they would have in restoring the true representative democracy of the people of Canada?

We were told we were wasting our time and that the Liberal long gun registry would never be eliminated. Opposition candidates in the five federal elections in which I contested continually attacked my support for the people of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke who wanted to see the Liberal long gun registry scrapped. They never wavered in their opposition to the registry and I never wavered in my support for them.

That brings us to today. The long gun registry has to go. When it does I will be celebrating with my constituents. The time has come for us to get on with it.

•(1030)

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, something keeps happening over and over and over again. Until now, the debates in the House have been polarized. Of course there are irritants. After speaking with hunters, collectors and the people in our ridings, we on this side of the House realize that there are irritants in the gun registry.

The NDP's position has always been to find a compromise between the views of the Conservatives—and others who oppose the registry for understandable reasons that could well be debated—and the views of those who wish to keep the registry. In particular, I am thinking about the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

I wonder why we cannot find a way to work together to eliminate the irritants and keep the registry, instead of being so polarized in our attitudes and saying that this is a black and white issue and that the registry must either be eliminated or kept. While it was expensive to set up, it has a proven track record when it comes to reducing gun-related crimes. We could work together to come to a compromise that would satisfy those who oppose the registry and those who see a concrete need for keeping it.

I would like to hear the government member's thoughts on that.
[English]

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, front-line officers tell me that the Liberal gun registry is of no benefit. They automatically assume in any situation they are going into there is the potential that a firearm could be present whether it is registered or not.

Furthermore, they have told me that when they pull somebody over to do a licence plate check, the computer automatically defaults to the gun registry even if they do not specifically access it. This creates an artificially inflated number of times that the gun registry is actually accessed.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am someone who has done grassroots activism all my life. So, even when I do not agree with the goal, I cannot help but share the member's excitement in the stories of organizing and changing government policy that one opposes.

Government Orders

At this point, as the registry is about to be ended, does the member agree there is money invested in the data and that it would cost money to destroy it? As long as some provinces would like access to it, should we not keep that data available for a period of years so that provinces can assess whether their law enforcement agencies would like to continue to have access to it?

• (1035)

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is absolutely not.

My constituents and people across Canada want to see the information destroyed and deleted. As it is, with the passage of time, even within days of receiving the information at the Firearms Centre, the information is outdated. This is what police officers tell us. This bill is what our constituents want.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am from Halifax and the Halifax chief of police, Frank Beazley, has talked a couple of times, including as recently as two days ago, about why it is important to keep the registry, how he and his police force use it in Halifax.

I find this very perplexing. The Conservatives purport to be the champions of law and order. They purport to be the champions of the police. They purport to be the champions of the victims. However, we have a situation where victims groups and police organizations want to keep the gun registry. If we are really concerned about law and order, why are the Conservatives not keeping their promise to get more boots on the ground? Really, that is what it is about.

When are the Conservatives actually going to keep their promises to police officers about getting those boots on the ground and keeping the registry?

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant: Mr. Speaker, once we are no longer spending money on the maintenance of the long gun registry, that will free up some money in the budget to allocate to things such as getting more front-line police officers. That is something we will talk about once the budgetary money is freed up.

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is really an honour to follow my colleague, the member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, an MP who has fought long and hard to get rid of Bill C-68. The people in the riding she represents have appreciated that to the extent where they have elected her on five consecutive occasions. They have worked with her and have been of enormous assistance particularly in the fight against Bill C-68 and the efforts to scrap it.

I am pleased to add my voice to those who support C-19, the ending of the long-gun registry bill. It is long overdue. As many of my hon. colleagues have observed, this is not a new issue; we have been discussing this for many years.

I have to mention that some of us who are still in Parliament remember that fateful day, December 5, 1995, when the then minister of justice, Allan Rock, because of a Liberal majority was able to get Bill C-68 passed, despite the mountains of evidence that simply registering a firearm would not stop criminals from using firearms in a violent fashion, to rob somebody or to intimidate somebody. There was no evidence that would stop that at all.

Instead, with the passing of that bill, Mr. Rock turned millions of law-abiding firearm owners in this country into what the Liberal government determined to be criminals, despite the fact that the firearm owners had observed every firearm safety law that there was. They had shown their competence to own and use a firearm. They had licences. Despite all that, the Liberal government said that it did not trust them. The fact that they had used their firearms peacefully for many years, and some for many decades, was irrelevant. The Liberal government said that it did not trust them to be competent and experienced, and to obey the law.

The Liberals decided to make people register their firearms and put their names on a list that would give the government and the police authorities all kinds of unconstitutional powers to monitor and check on them. Notwithstanding that these people had never committed a crime in their lives and that they were law-abiding people with families, people who used their guns to hunt or for sport shooting; notwithstanding the mountains of evidence that they were competent and capable of using a firearm, the Liberals did not trust them.

The Liberals told people that by passing Bill C-68. On that fateful day, December 5, 1995, I was joined by my colleague from Yorkton—Melville, who has been a champion of getting rid of the long gun registry. I was in the company of the member for Calgary—Nose Hill, who is the current Minister of State of Foreign Affairs for the Americas and Consular Affairs. I was joined by the member for Vancouver Island North, who is the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development. I was joined by the member for Vegreville—Wainwright. Indeed, I was joined by the member for Calgary Southwest, who of course is now the Prime Minister of Canada and leader of the Conservative Party of Canada.

Our leader promised that we would put an end to the gun registry, and now we are keeping that promise.

In particular, this is an issue of great importance to my riding of Cariboo—Prince George. It is a fairly rural riding with about four areas that we would call cities and towns. There is a lot of rural area.

• (1040)

There are many farmers, outdoor enthusiasts, forestry workers, miners, and many people who spend their time making a living in remote areas of my riding. These are folks who grew up using long guns and who use them sometimes in their day-to-day lives for work and recreation. It goes with the territory of the riding of Cariboo—Prince George. In short, long guns have been in use for many decades in my riding and they are used in a lawful fashion by law-abiding citizens.

Of course, every part of the country has people who use firearms for criminal intent, but they do not much care whether the firearm they are using is registered or not. As a matter of fact, they spend a lot of time looking to purchase or acquire smuggled illegal firearms that come from all parts of the world into Canada through criminal organizations. They do not really care much about the long gun registry and they are going to commit their criminal offences with firearms anyway.

Government Orders

The use of long guns has been a fairly normal part of life in Cariboo—Prince George for hunting, outdoor activity, sport shooting, and on the shooting range. What else is normal is that in my riding office since 1995, we have literally received thousands of cards, letters and phone calls from concerned constituents who want to know when we are going to get rid of the long gun registry that the Liberals put in. It started one day after December 5, 1995. We were charged with the responsibility of getting rid of the long gun registry. It has been a long fight. I have to admit sometimes it seemed like it was just a dream, but we are here with a strong, stable, majority Conservative government, and a Prime Minister who made this promise that we would get rid of the long gun registry. He is keeping his promise. This bill, Bill C-19, is going to do exactly that.

Our Prime Minister made that promise. The member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke made that promise. I made that promise. The member for Yorkton—Melville, my colleague from Vegreville—Wainwright, my colleague from Vancouver Island North, my colleague from Calgary—Nose Hill all made that promise. Led by our Prime Minister, we are keeping that promise today, which is more than we can say for some of the NDP members who made that promise to their constituents and had no intention of keeping it.

The people who have been calling us and asking for our help to get rid of the long gun registry are good people who care passionately about this issue. These are not criminals who are calling us, because after all, criminals do not care whether the firearm they are using in a criminal activity is registered or not.

As a matter of fact, I believe that the criminal elements in this country are responsible for bringing in illegal firearms. In December 1995 they were cheering on the then minister of justice, Mr. Rock, because all of a sudden, their market became pretty darn good for criminals who wanted to acquire firearms. I do not doubt that the price went up considerably when Bill C-68 was brought in.

We have been dealing with that criminal element by bringing in a multitude of anti-crime bills, and we are going to keep doing that. We are going to show the criminal element in this country that they cannot commit crimes under a Conservative government and get away with it. We will put them in jail. We will give them meaningful sentences that fit the crime that they commit.

When Bill C-19 passes, we will have fulfilled our promise to law-abiding firearm owners that we do not consider them to be criminals as the Liberals did and the NDP do. We are going to recognize they are law-abiding citizens capable of owning long guns without having onerous legislation like Bill C-68 breathing down their necks every single moment of their lives.

• (1045)

[Translation]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I must point out the contradiction in the conclusion made by my colleague in his speech.

Under the copyright bill, people who break the electronic lock protecting works could be sent to prison or a penitentiary for up to five years. In the meantime, the government wants to be kind and avoid treating gun owners like criminals. That is honourable. We have made proposals to smooth out the process and to avoid having

gun owners who have not registered their firearms be systematically threatened with prison terms.

How can my colleague live with that contradiction?

[English]

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite is missing the point. The fact is that people in this country who want to legally acquire a firearm must get the appropriate licence, the acquisition permits and must show that they are confident and stable enough to own a firearm. The whole point of it is to ensure that no one who is not competent, does not know the safety rules and does not abide by the law ever owns a firearm. Registration is an extension of some sort that the Liberals introduced in 1995 thinking that would accomplish this. They were looking at the back end rather than the front end.

We have always said that unstable people should not have firearms, that people with criminal backgrounds should not have firearms and that people who do not abide by the law should not have firearms. We have always said that good, upstanding citizens who have a good reason to own a firearm should have a firearm. Once all of this has been proven beyond a shadow of a doubt through the licensing process and the acquisition process, then that person should be able to own a firearm.

The registry is what it is. It turned into a bureaucratic, incredibly expensive nest egg. It cost about \$2 billion in the first few years after it was implemented and after the then minister of justice told us in the House that it would cost, and I believe the number he used was about \$300,000 or \$400,000. He also said that it would be self-sustaining by the fees. That turned out to be outlandish, which is why we are opposed to it.

• (1050)

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been getting a lot of positive feedback in my riding since we introduced the bill. My constituents are very concerned and they would like to see this registry abolished as soon as possible.

I am wondering if the member could tell us how much money taxpayers can expect to save on an annual basis moving forward once we abolish this registry.

Mr. Richard Harris: Mr. Speaker, as I said, when Bill C-68 was introduced, the minister of justice at the time said that it would cost Canadians about \$200,000 to \$400,000. Even if he had said that it would cost \$2 million, it would not have mattered. However, it actually cost well over \$2 billion and is now costing us somewhere around \$2 million to \$4 million a year and is not doing anything more than it did back in 1995 when it was first introduced.

All of the money that we would be able to save by getting rid of the long gun registry through Bill C-19 would go into our anti-crime fight, which is where it should be. Instead of chasing farmers, target shooters and sportsmen and spending time checking out whether they are still law-abiding, all of our resources should be put toward counteracting crime in this country and going after the people who commit crimes.

Government Orders

I am really proud of our Prime Minister and my colleagues who have had to fight against the registry for so many years. Bill C-19 will do the job.

The Speaker: I would like to inform the House that at this point in the debate the time allotted for speeches will switch to 10 minutes for speeches and 5 minutes for questions and comments.

Resuming debate. The hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-19, which would abolish the long gun registry. I am pleased because this is the first time I have the opportunity to speak to this issue, which has been discussed for a long time now. There have not been many debates, but we have had some. The issue has been coming up since at least 2006.

The riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques is half rural and half urban. So I can understand both aspects of the debate. The urban part is Rimouski, which has 45,000 inhabitants. The other half of my riding is much more rural. I have spoken with a number of my constituents who are interested in and affected by this debate. I asked them questions about the registry. They replied with arguments for both sides of the issue, which is not surprising.

I spoke with hunters, collectors and long gun owners about this issue. They are concerned about the registry, with respect to some points brought up by the government. They said that the registry cost too much in the beginning, that it criminalizes gun owners and makes them feel guilty, among other similar arguments. I understand that.

However, I spoke with other people, people who work at a shelter for battered women in Rimouski-Neigette called La Débrouille. There, I heard another perfectly valid argument that the registry saves lives and that police officers in the riding use it in domestic violence incidents.

I would like to talk about these various factors and how to reconcile them. To the hunters, gun collectors and other people I speak to about the registry, I tell them that the NDP has made an effort to reconcile the various positions and to eliminate the sticking points of the bill that have been raised, without eliminating the registry itself. Often, they do not know what those sticking points are, but they include criminalization for a first offence for not registering one's firearm, the fact that it does not recognize traditional aboriginal rights and so on. When I talk to people about what was actually in the bill that my colleague from northern Ontario introduced last year, I tell them that we could keep the registry and eliminate those sticking points. They usually reply that this would be a good way of addressing their complaints, their concerns.

I believe that it is our duty as members, as representatives of our constituents, to get away from polarizing debates like this one, in which things are very black and white and we are forced to take a position either for or against. Instead, I think we must try to find a middle ground between the two sides. Honestly, as long as I have been in this House, I have never seen that happen. I have seen many polarizing positions. In the case of Bill C-19 or that of the long gun

registry in general, the government has been having a field day with this issue. It was pretty easy to do from a financial perspective, which is too bad.

When I mention this position of conciliation to firearm owners, they understand and they are willing to comply. I would have liked the Conservative members to do the same thing in their ridings, instead of trying to antagonize the situation and polarize people further, which is what they have been doing for the past five or six years.

To those wanting to keep the registry, I submit as an example the situation of the shelter called La Débrouille in Rimouski-Neigette. This shelter says—and this might be news to the hon. members opposite—that when an abused woman stays at a shelter, she can choose to file a complaint against her attacker, her spouse. If she chooses to do so, the police consult the registry to see whether there are any firearms in the family home. If there are, the police can, depending on the situation, get a search warrant and remove the firearms. We are talking about a situation in which a woman is abused, where her life is definitely at risk.

• (1055)

The signs are clear: that woman's life is in danger. In Rimouski-Neigette, which constitutes half my riding—one of the 308 ridings in Canada—the registry is consulted at least once a day by the shelter for abused women, for this type of situation alone. Yes, the registry is useful. Yes, the registry can prevent crime.

I would also like to point out that the statistics do not lie in this case, either: 88% of the spousal homicides committed with a firearm in Canada are committed with a rifle or a shotgun. These are ordinary firearms. That is not to say that hunters or people who own firearms and rifles are potential killers or murderers, but given the number of firearms, it is clear that these firearms are more likely to be used in cases of domestic abuse.

The police have to verify whether there is a firearm, as has been mentioned in a number of debates. The police presume, when they intervene in a case of domestic violence, that there is a firearm in the home being investigated. Knowing human nature and what might be going through the mind of the police officer who has to intervene in all sorts of situations, his intervention will be much more effective if he knows that there is a firearm rather than if he simply presumes there is.

• (1100)

The Speaker: The hon. member will have three minutes to finish his speech after question period. We will now move on to statements by members.

*Statements by Members***STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

[English]

GREEK COMMUNITY

Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today as a proud Canadian of Hellenic descent. It was on this day, on October 28, 1940, that the Greek people stood up for freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law by loudly professing a resounding *oxi*, no, to the fascists that were enacting the brutality all over Europe.

For a small nation of just over 7.2 million people at the time, this was a difficult decision for the world knew all too well the onslaught and massacre that was to follow. This courageous stance by the Greek people resulted in the loss of 805,000 lives or 11.5% of the country's population.

Today Canadians from coast to coast stand with the Greek community and with all veterans in remembrance of all those who sacrificed so much for the rights and freedoms that we all enjoy.

* * *

[Translation]

YAMASKA IMMIGRATION SERVICES

Mr. Réjean Genest (Shefford, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to talk about the exemplary work of Solidarité ethnique régionale de la Yamaska, or SERY, a non-profit organization in my riding.

SERY's mission is to welcome immigrants and help them integrate into society, and to promote intercultural ties while respecting the values of the host community. Newcomers receive assistance from staff for the first five years. Acceptance and respect for cultural diversity are the team's strengths. SERY's motto is to never judge someone without walking five kilometres in their shoes.

This week, SERY put on its annual show featuring performances by newcomers. There were over 800 people in the audience. On behalf of the people of Shefford and all the members in the House, I congratulate SERY on its success.

* * *

[English]

SNOWBIRDS

Mr. Ray Boughen (Palliser, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 21, I watched pilots and technicians work as a team to bring the 41st season of the Snowbirds to a close. The Snowbirds are the famed Canadian icon that thrills audiences across North America every year with their aerial ballet. Representing the skill, professionalism and teamwork of the Canadian Forces, the Snowbirds are an inspiration to Canadians.

This past season was themed, "Our Canadian Heroes", to recognize the sacrifices made by members of the Canadian Forces and their families. Members of the Canadian Forces are often deployed to harsh conditions away from their loved ones. Their sacrifices cannot be measured, but we must do our best to recognize and appreciate their commitment.

I encourage people to check out a Snowbirds show as they pass through their hometowns next year.

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RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party of Canada continues to stand up for the rights of religious minorities and for the universal right to religious freedom for all faiths.

Last night, the Liberal Party of Canada once again stood up to tell the government and the world that the atrocities facing Coptic Christians in Egypt could not be allowed to continue. Through the tireless work of the Liberal MP for Scarborough—Agincourt, along with others in the Liberal caucus and party, including the distinguished member for Mount Royal, the issue of the persecution of Christians has been raised repeatedly by our members on the floor of the House of Commons.

The Coptic Christian faith in Canada is a robust and positive force in Canadian society and Canadian neighbourhoods. In the home of the Coptic faith in Egypt, Coptic Christians have preached peace for centuries, yet they have been persecuted and murdered for their faith and seemingly all but abandoned by those with a duty to protect.

Never forget, Coptic Christians are among the original Egyptians who now willingly share their land for one Egypt. Coptic Christianity is one of the oldest religions in all of Egypt, which persevered by the faith of its members and by—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke Centre.

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THE LINCOLN AND WELLAND REGIMENT

Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend a great Niagara regiment, with a lineage reaching back to the War of 1812, The Lincoln and Welland Regiment held a parade and memorial service in honour of the battle of Bergen-op-Zoom fought in October of 1944. As this date falls near Remembrance Day, members of The Lincoln and Welland annually commemorate this battle as part of their active remembrance and regimental reunion.

The battle was one of the defining events in the history of this great regiment and the valour displayed by the soldiers during the fight that took place marked it as one of the best battalions in the Canadian line. The operations in and around Bergen-op-Zoom was part of the campaign by the Canadian army to clear the Scheldt Estuary in order to open the Port of Antwerp. These operations were crucial to the allied cause. The port facilities of Antwerp were captured intact in the Scheldt Estuary cleared for the allied operations to continue.

The regiment's motto is, "*Non Nobis Sed Patriae*", meaning "Not for ourselves but for our country". God bless The Lincoln and Welland Regiment.

• (1105)

[Translation]

JOLIETTE SOUP KITCHEN

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to take this opportunity to pay a glowing tribute to the directors and volunteers of La Tablée Joliette.

Founded in 1981 by the Clerics of Saint-Viateur, the soup kitchen is a non-profit organization that prepares and distributes 5,000 to 6,000 free meals each year to people in need in my riding.

I was able to see first-hand the exceptional work accomplished by this community organization by helping the volunteers over the Thanksgiving long weekend.

I would like to recognize the involvement of the soup kitchen's president, Raymond Veillette, and his team of volunteers, which include Marie-Pauline Blake, Léonie Ferland, Julie Cornellier, Diane Fournier and Alain-Bruno Bonin.

These people prove that the battle against hunger and poverty is a collective effort, and they deserve all the support we can give them.

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[English]

REPUBLIC OF TURKEY

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on October 23, the eastern province of Van in Turkey was struck by a powerful and devastating earthquake. Hundreds of people were killed and thousands injured. Canada stands shoulder to shoulder with the Turkish people during this difficult time.

Today, Turkey, a friend of Canada, is celebrating the 88th anniversary of its foundation. On October 29, 1923, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk proclaimed the modern Republic of Turkey.

Our two countries enjoy a solid friendship that transcends the economic and political domain. We are partnered bilaterally and multilaterally through organizations such as NATO and the G20, and thousands of Canadians of Turkish origin contribute invaluable to Canadian society.

On behalf of all Canadians, I would like to congratulate Turkey and the Turkish people in celebrating the creation of their modern state. May the future bring peace and prosperity to Turkey and all its citizens.

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AGRI-TRADE EXPOSITION

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am excited to announce the 28th annual Agri-Trade Exposition that will take place in my riding November 9 to 12.

The Red Deer Chamber of Commerce, the Westerner Exposition Association and the driving force behind the expo, Pat Kennedy, are all to be thanked for this year's upcoming success.

This year's theme is "International Agriculture Products and Service", fitting, as we welcome the U.S. Commerce Department as one of our 450 exhibitors.

Statements by Members

Come to the Fortis Learning Stage to discuss agriculture ideas, technology, programs and new green initiatives. Talk to experts from across the nation to get answers to various farming questions. Attend seminars about crops, fertilizing, grain quality and much more. There will even be a comedian, prizes and student bursaries awarded throughout the expo.

Therefore, I invite all hon. members to come down to Red Deer's Westerner Park and experience a "one of a kind" exhibition that will cultivate their minds.

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PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am so very honoured today to say how proud I am that two teachers in my riding of Scarborough Southwest are recipients of this year's prestigious Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence.

One of those is Lynn Wilkins, an elementary school teacher at Courcelette Public School. Ms. Wilkins' full list of accomplishments are simply too numerous to mention here. Her sustainable building project integrates many different subjects with a view to teaching students the importance of the environment and sustainable development. Another of her projects teaches students to build an NGO from the group up.

If this is not enough, her students raised thousands of dollars to assist in building a school in Haiti, support the World Wildlife Fund and help the Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto.

Our community is truly privileged to have such a dedicated, enthusiastic and innovative teacher working in our schools.

I want to extend my sincere congratulations to Ms. Wilkins on receiving the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence and thank her for the commitment she demonstrates on a daily basis to the students at Courcelette Public School.

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• (1110)

PRIME MINISTER'S AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Joe Daniel (Don Valley East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I also rise today to honour two teachers in my riding who were recognized recently for their ingenuity, innovation and dedication to education by their students, colleagues and parents.

On October 5, Shirley Dalrymple and Scott Masters were recognized for their leadership with the Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence.

Shirley is a math teacher at Thornhill Secondary School. She has given 20 years to the profession and has fascinated thousands of young minds through her integration of technology to make learning fun and interesting for her pupils.

Statements by Members

Scott, a history teacher at Crestwood Preparatory School, brings history to life for his students by working with local veterans and students to digitize the stories of veterans with interviews, photos and documents to ensure their story will always be heard and never forgotten.

I congratulate Shirley and Scott for their selections as recipients of this award. I look forward to seeing more great educators from Don Valley East on the list of recipients next year.

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JIMMY LOMAX

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 9, Hamilton's Santa Claus, Jimmy Lomax, passed away at his home.

Known throughout our community for his immense generosity and kindness, Jimmy and his wife Susan were the heart and soul of Operation Santa Claus, a charitable organization they founded in 1958 to help collect and distribute gifts to underprivileged families throughout Hamilton.

Jimmy's dedication to helping the less fortunate earned him numerous recognitions, including Hamilton's Distinguished Citizen of the Year, The Queen's Jubilee Medal, the Ontario Medal for Outstanding Citizenship and our highest honour, the Order of Canada.

Jimmy is also extremely deserving of the Hamilton's children's park that will be named in his honour in the coming weeks. Christmas in Hamilton just will not be same with Santa Jimmy.

On behalf of all hon. members, I would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to the Lomax family. Jimmy's dedication to helping children, especially during the holiday season, was an inspiration to all and he will be greatly missed.

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WORLD CUP KABBADI

Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it gives me immense pleasure to inform the House that Kabbadi Team Canada will be participating in the second World Cup Kabbadi in Punjab, India.

Across various districts in the state of Punjab from November 1 to November 20, 2011, this mega sports event will feature the participation of 14 countries, including Canada.

I would like to congratulate the organizers and officials who worked tirelessly for our team Canada, including Joga Kang, Onkar Grewal, Paramjit Deol, Sukhpal Rathaul, Sukh Pandher, and Gurjeet Singh.

On behalf of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale and all Canadians, we are proud of Kabbadi Team Canada and wish them all the success in the world.

HAROLD HUSKILSON

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Nova Scotians were saddened this week to learn of the passing of a truly great man, Harold Huskilson.

Mr. Huskilson, who was 91, was committed to his community and his province. He was a lifelong member of the Nova Scotia Liberal Party, the Trinity United Church and the Beacon United Church. He was also a charter member of the Shelburne Kinsman Club, the Royal Canadian Legion and an active member of the Masonic Lodge.

Hr. Huskilson served on both the Shelburne Town Council and the Yarmouth Town Council. He was then elected to the House of Assembly as MLA for Shelburne and served in a number of key ministerial posts over a 23-year career.

He worked tirelessly to bring investment and attention to his corner of the province and will be remembered as a man who was there to assist anyone in need.

I know all members will join me in extending our sincere condolences to the Huskilson family.

* * *

THE COMMONWEALTH

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the 16 Commonwealth leaders have agreed to a proposal to amend the rules governing the line of succession to the throne. No longer will it matter if an heir's first born is a boy or a girl.

Obvious modernizations will help the Crown to remain an institution that reflects the values of Canadians and all realms of the Commonwealth that have Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II as our head of state.

Since the founding of the Commonwealth in 1931, our common heritage has united us. However, the Commonwealth has become more than just about common history. Our common values flow from that history, principles such as freedom, democracy, human rights and the rule of law also unite us. From this background, we draw our Westminster system of responsible government. We believe in principles that deserve universal application.

Unfortunately, in some parts of the world, there is still not universal acceptance of these principles.

As the Prime Minister said, the Commonwealth is a "noble aspiration".

God save the Queen.

* * *

•(1115)

[Translation]

PARKS CANADA

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. minister responsible for Parks Canada recently declared that Sable Island would become a national wildlife area, which in itself is good.

Oral Questions

However, this past spring, the same minister cut 56% of the financial support for a number of organizations responsible for safeguarding existing wildlife areas, such as the Baie de l'Isle-Verte National Wildlife Area, which is in my riding and which has been doing remarkable work for decades. What is even more ironic is that this government said that its economic plan would include expanding national parks. This raises some questions.

Does the government plan on increasing the number of wildlife areas while still making massive cuts to financial support? Is the government aware of the negative impact such a policy will have on tourism and on Canada's image abroad? We have to assume that the answer is no, this government is not aware of its bad choices when it comes to the environment and the sustainable economy.

* * *

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Robert Goguen (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know that my constituents and fellow New Brunswickers are outraged at the comments made by the Liberal leader just yesterday on Canada's next Auditor General.

According to the Liberal leader and the Liberal Party, they believe that working in New Brunswick does not qualify for some of the bigger jobs in Toronto or Ottawa. Might I remind the Liberal leader and the Liberal Party that New Brunswick is Canada's only official bilingual province.

Mr. Ferguson's outstanding performance as New Brunswick's auditor general and deputy minister of finance, according to the Liberal Party, is no experience for the job. That is outrageous.

I call upon the Liberal Party to formally apologize to Mr. Ferguson and all the residents of my home province for this insulting attack.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that the government has decided to take the same strategy it is using with the gun registry and apply it to the Canadian navy: invest billions of dollars in procurement, only to throw it all out. The *Victoria*, the *Corner Brook*, the *Windsor* and the *Chicoutimi* are being thrown in the trash.

Can the government confirm that it is getting rid of the Victoria-class submarines?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): No, Mr. Speaker. Our government is investing to ensure that we have the ideal mix of naval capacities to protect Canada's sovereignty. We intend to continue working with the Canadian Forces to guarantee the best level of service in order to protect Canada's sovereignty.

[English]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it appears the government has already begun to move. Here is what the

Minister of National Defence had to say this week, "In an ideal world, I know nuclear subs are what's needed—".

We can all agree the Liberals did a terrible job when they bought the Victoria class subs. Canadians were misled about their true costs and capabilities. What Canadians wanted then and what they want today is certainty.

Would the Conservatives confirm that their government is really ready to go down a multi billion dollar rabbit hole of nuclear submarines?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the quick answer to that is, no. I think the hon. member has to be wary of relying unduly on misleading reports from the CBC.

What is true is that our government is investing in the right mix and balance for our forces to have a naval capacity necessary to defend and protect Canada's sovereignty on all our ocean frontiers.

I can tell members and reassure the hon. member that there is no plan to replace the diesel electric fleet purchased by the Liberals.

[Translation]

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems quite clear that the Conservatives have absolutely no plans for military procurement. This situation with the submarine fleet reeks of improvisation. In terms of our air force, the Conservatives' decision to purchase F-35s is making less and less sense. Even the government is starting to realize it.

Will the government reconsider its untended purchase of F-35s?

[English]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our commitment has been, clearly, to give our Canadian Forces members, including those in the Royal Canadian Air Force, the equipment they need to do the job well. The fact is, and reasonable people agree, we need to have new aircraft. The current CF-18s are, of course, aging aircraft that have been around for quite some time.

We are moving forward, together with our allies, with the only fifth generation fighter of its kind. The F-35 is something that offers stealth capability and will protect our Canadian airmen and airwomen, so that they will be able to do their job protecting our sovereignty in the safest and most effective fashion possible.

• (1120)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pressure is mounting against the purchase of F-35s. Today, we learned that the Minister of National Defence is increasingly offside from other cabinet members and the Prime Minister's Office. Why? Because the F-35 does not work in the Arctic and is plagued by delays. It is wildly over budget and the list goes on and on.

Will the government finally stop its F-35 boondoggle before it is just too late?

Oral Questions

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only boondoggle I know about these days is the gun registry.

However, I am pleased to infuse a dose of reality into the opposition's misguided rant about F-35 aircraft. Recently, I saw firsthand the direct benefits of economic growth and job creation in Magellan Bristol Aerospace in Winnipeg as with over 60-some other Canadians companies.

Canadian families are benefiting from the production in Canada of F-35 components. Our budget is on track. It will create economic growth, as well as looking after the needs of our men and women in uniform, and Canadian sovereignty.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would feel a bit defensive, too, if I signed on to a program that even conservative U.S. senator John McCain called "a train wreck". Even our international partners, such as Australia, Israel and Turkey, are now delaying their commitment to the F-35s.

When will the Conservatives finally admit their F-35 boondoggle is quickly unravelling and bring it to an end?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the infusion of rhetoric on this very important acquisition of an asset critical to the sovereignty of Canada, providing our men and women the appropriate tools well into the future to do their job, is absolutely overwhelming. It is obviously because of political positioning.

We are focused on what is necessary to maintain Canada's sovereignty. We are not playing politics. This is a critical asset that we intend to fulfill as we go forward.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Quebec National Assembly voted in favour of a motion calling on the government to grant access to the information in the firearms registry. Why will this government not recognize that this information is very valuable to the provinces and why does it still refuse to give in to common sense?

I will ask the government once more here today. Is the government willing to make this valuable information available to the provinces?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our legislation is clear. It will actually eliminate the long gun registry, and that means eliminating the records which have become inaccurate and unreliable, and they will become increasingly so over time.

We are bound to protect the privacy rights of Canadians and that includes the rights of those who are law-abiding gun owners who have participated in the registry. The existing licensing requirements, of course, are going to remain.

We are committed to eliminating this wasteful and ineffective long gun registry. We will not allow a back door re-establishment of the long gun registry.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, TD Bank said yesterday what we all knew already, that the government will not balance its books until 2017, after the next election.

This is bad news for Canadian families who have been told they had to wait until the budget was balanced for any of the government's promised support for families.

Why do Canadian families have to wait in line for six years to receive any support while the largest, most profitable corporations in the country get their tax cuts right now?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my Liberal friend opposite has a very short memory.

We delivered tax cuts for Canadian families in the form of lowering income taxes, in the form of tax reductions for things like a sports and fitness tax credit, and participation in the arts tax credit. We reduced the GST twice.

What all those events had in common was that the Liberal Party voted against them. Our party is the only party committed to reducing taxes. We continue to be the only party in this House committed to reducing taxes.

We are also committed to getting our budget balanced in the medium-term to ensure that we keep Canada's fiscal advantage, one that has delivered 650,000 net new jobs to Canadians and is leading the G8 in growth.

Hon. John McCallum (Markham—Unionville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it makes no sense for these Conservatives to delay support for families until after the next election when, with any luck, they will be out of power. Also, Canadians are going to wake up to a nasty surprise on January 1, an EI payroll tax increase.

Could the government explain by what twisted logic Canadian families must wait and watch while the government levies a massive tax on jobs and refuses to provide them with any support?

•(1125)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadian families did wait for help in the form of reduced taxes for 13 long years.

However, since 2006, they have been receiving those benefits from our government, benefits that now total, for a typical Canadian family, over \$3,000 less in taxes paid. That is over \$3,000 more in their pockets. That is one of the reasons why the Canadian economy has been performing well.

We have avoided the path that the Liberals would have us go, the path that other countries are on, that of high taxes, high debt and high deficit, the very path that is causing threats to the global economy from elsewhere.

Oral Questions

Here in Canada, we have avoided that path. That is why our economy is strong and we will say on that path.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the reckless and spiteful decision to destroy all gun registry records shows just how out of touch the government really is. Yesterday, the Quebec National Assembly voted unanimously to demand the records be kept. It is even threatening legal action.

The government is not just destroying records, it is destroying a key tool for keeping our communities safe.

Why is the government insulting provinces that want to create their own registry? Why is it playing politics with public safety?

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our commitment to Canadians was to destroy and end the long gun registry.

The long gun registry is the data. The data is flawed, it is inaccurate, and it does not target criminals. It targets law-abiding Canadians. We will continue to have the licensing process. That information will be accessible to all law enforcement agencies.

Make no mistake, we will end the long gun registry which is the data.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government is deliberately turning a blind eye. The Government of Quebec is threatening to go to court to prevent the destruction of the firearms registry data. Quebecers paid their share to establish this registry. Quebec families, the parents of victims of the Polytechnique and Dawson College massacres, and the president of Quebec's Association of Families of Persons Assassinated or Disappeared, established by Senator Boisvenu, are calling for gun controls to remain in place.

Is this government going to eliminate this method of ensuring public safety?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we said during the election campaign, we will destroy the long gun registry. Why? Simply because this registry does not reduce crime. Those who say the contrary are spouting pure ideology. The crime rate has been decreasing for several years in Canada, but not because of the registry. That takes more stringent laws. This registry unfairly targets hunters and farmers by treating them like potential criminals. I hope that the Government of Quebec will respect the division of powers and Canada's jurisdictions. This is a federal jurisdiction and we will destroy this registry as we said we would.

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the National Assembly of Quebec voted unanimously to demand that the long gun registry records be kept. Quebec families paid for that registry and they are asking that it now be given to them. I myself am a hunter and maintaining this information does not limit my activities in any way. The Conservatives are saying that the data must be destroyed simply because it must be destroyed. When

we ask them why, we encounter a black hole, much like their political agenda.

Will this government finally be open with Quebec and grant its request to transfer the data?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are going to destroy the long gun—shotguns and rifles—registry data. Why? Because the registry is the data. That is what we said in our election campaign and that is what we are going to do. I am asking the Government of Quebec to respect the Canadian Constitution. This bill was created and established based on the Criminal Code, which falls under federal jurisdiction. It is in our power. We are doing what we have to do. We do not interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction. We are destroying the registry because it is the best thing to do. We have laws, here in the House, to prevent crime.

• (1130)

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, collecting the data in the firearms registry required an enormous investment. The registry cost a lot of money—it was clearly designed by those responsible for the sponsorship scandal—but now we have that data and we have a provincial government that is asking to be able to use it. As a hunter, I do not have any objection to sharing this information, so why is the government being so childish?

Why spend taxpayers' money only to destroy data for which we all paid?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the data in the long gun registry is inaccurate. That is what the Auditor General said in 2002 when she announced her findings with regard to this scandal, as the hon. member just mentioned. The registry was the first Liberal scandal. It was supposed to cost \$2 million but it cost several million, if not close to \$2 billion. We all remember the second Liberal scandal, the sponsorship scandal. For us, the important thing is that this data is not accurate, as the Auditor General said in 2002. This would be like giving a Trojan horse to the Government of Quebec.

* * *

[*English*]

CHARITABLE ORGANIZATIONS

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hundreds of thousands of volunteers and overworked staff at Canadian charities were shocked when they opened their newspapers this morning. With no consultation and no plan, the government is recklessly considering slashing its contribution to Canada's charities unless they meet the Conservative government's narrow partisan agenda.

Oral Questions

Charity workers are not vacationing on Challenger jets, like the members opposite. They deserve the government's support. Instead of picking winners and losers, why will the government not stand behind Canada's vital charitable sector?

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are always interested in new models to partner with private sector organizations to deliver results. This is why the minister has set up the voluntary advisory committee to discuss ways to leverage government funding and investments to ensure a maximum social impact to help those in need.

While current funding models ensure fiscal accountability, our focus is to ensure that funding gets results and that taxes collected from hardworking Canadians have the biggest impact on those who really need it.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that answer did not give comfort to a single charity in this country.

There are about 83,000 registered charities in Canada, and they employ 10% of our country's workforce. Those are a lot of jobs and vital contributions that this country cannot afford to lose. We are talking about over one million hard-working Canadians who contribute to our country every day. They deserve better than to have their government undermine their important contributions and threaten their jobs.

Would the government at least be honest with them about what it has in mind? They and the people they serve deserve nothing less.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, we are looking at new models to make sure that we can leverage our government's commitment and leverage our government's investments to ensure that those most in need get what they need and get it soon.

Unlike the NDP, which wants to tax individuals and make sure that we are not creating jobs in this country, we have focused on those in need by creating new models that provide them with opportunities to get what they need through charities. In fact, our finance committee is now looking at how to best leverage that, so I look forward to the NDP supporting our direction at the finance committee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Manon Perreault (Montcalm, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the government wants to change how it funds non-profit and charitable organizations.

These organizations generally rely on volunteers and overworked staff. These organizations too often do the work of the Conservatives, who continue to back away from their social responsibilities. And now they are being told that they will receive even less government assistance.

Why is the government attacking these organizations that provide vital services to the people?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of

Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, we are working to build our charitable sector in this country.

What the member opposite said is completely false. The minister has been working with a voluntary advisory committee to discuss ways to leverage our investments to ensure maximum impact for those in need.

I encourage the NDP to get on board with what our finance committee is doing, making sure we leverage what is available to our communities and charities. I encourage all of those members to volunteer like I do with the YMCA.

* * *

[*Translation*]

SENIORS

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, too many seniors are unable to retire when they had hoped to. According to a Sun Life study, the majority of workers will stay on the job well past the age of 65, not by choice, but simply because they lack the money to retire. Seniors lost their savings during the recession and this government does not have a plan to fight poverty among seniors.

When will this government stop the corporate giveaways and take action that will allow seniors not to spend their retirement years in poverty?

• (1135)

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have worked hard to enhance retirement security for Canadians, especially our seniors.

For example, we have reduced taxes for seniors and retirees by \$2 billion, mainly by allowing pension income splitting. We restructured the framework for pensions that are under federal jurisdiction in order to better protect retirees. Together with the provinces, we have reviewed proposals for making other improvements, and we are about to implement the new pooled registered pension plan, or PRPP. We hope that the NDP will support this measure.

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we obviously do not live on the same planet. There are more and more Canadian seniors who have too much debt and not enough income.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin.

Mr. Alain Giguère: Mr. Speaker, the number of poor seniors is increasing. The Conservatives' have a simple answer: let the financial markets provide guaranteed pension plans for Canadians. That is their answer. We know what happened during the recession. That strategy resulted in lost income because of the downturn in the financial markets.

Oral Questions

When will the government finally support Canadians and double Canada and Quebec pension plan benefits? It should do so immediately.

Mrs. Shelly Glover (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, we strive continually to help our seniors. We introduced several bills and the NDP voted against them. We are continuing, as are the provincial governments, to work on reforming the Canada pension plan. But, like many of the provinces, we share the concerns of small businesses and others with respect to any increase in costs at a time when the global economy is barely recovering.

* * *

AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, in committee, the President of the Public Service Commission of Canada, Mrs. Barrados, had this to say:

[*English*]

The way we operate in the Public Service is that the language requirement is an essential requirement.... If you don't meet the language requirement, you don't get the job.

[*Translation*]

Since a mastery of both official languages was clearly indicated as essential for the position of Auditor General and the person appointed by the Prime Minister is not bilingual, does the government realize what it is doing to the public service? Does it realize it is opening a Pandora's box?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government looked for bilingual candidates. After an extensive process, a candidate was chosen because he was by far the most qualified.

Mr. Ferguson is in the process of becoming comfortable in both of Canada's official languages, like many members here in the House. Mr. Ferguson has a proven track record within the provincial public service in New Brunswick.

[*English*]

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only member of the government's selection committee for the position of Auditor General outside of government circles was a registered lobbyist by the name of Kevin Dancey, the head of the CICA.

The purpose of lobbying is to benefit the organization being lobbied for. While he was advancing a position on who the Auditor General should be, Mr. Dancey was also actively lobbying every organization on the selection committee, including the Office of the Auditor General. In future, the same individual will likely be lobbying the very same Auditor General he helped select.

Does the government understand and realize the apparent and obvious conflict?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the qualifications of our candidate for Auditor General are unparalleled. As an example, the former Auditor

General, Sheila Fraser, says, "He will be a very good auditor general. He is very capable, a very nice person and I think once Parliamentarians get to know him, they will appreciate him".

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Maikel Nabil is a young Egyptian blogger, one of the early voices of the Tahrir Square revolution. He became the first political prisoner in the post-Mubarak era.

He was sentenced by a military tribunal in March to three years in jail on a bogus charge of insulting the Egyptian army and was further compromised by his pro-Israeli views. He is now in the 66th day of a hunger strike and has become, like the Christian Coptic community under assault, a symbol of the betrayal of the Tahrir revolution. His life hangs in the balance.

Will the government immediately seek his release from prison?

• (1140)

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are concerned about this situation. We take it very seriously. I can advise the House that we are in consultation, not just with authorities in the country but with like-minded partners, to address this situation. It is a very high priority for our government.

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[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, let us see if the record is still broken. Yesterday, in response to a question from my colleague about the decision to appoint a unilingual anglophone Auditor General, the President of the Treasury Board said, "Upon completion of a rigorous process, the most qualified candidate was chosen."

Now, we all agree that the President of the Treasury Board has zero credibility when it comes to undertaking a rigorous process. However, we would still like to know what is so rigorous about choosing a unilingual anglophone for a position that requires proficiency in both official languages.

[*English*]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, Mr. Ferguson is learning French, as are many members of this House and of the public service. If the member opposite doubts Mr. Ferguson's commitment, then perhaps he would like to come to the public accounts committee on Monday and ask him directly, as I am sure he will.

As far as Mr. Ferguson's qualifications are concerned, he comes with excellent references. However, the member need not take my word for it. Let me share one reference with you. The reference states, "He will be a very good auditor general. He is very capable, a very nice person and I think once Parliamentarians get to know him, they will appreciate him".

Oral Questions

Who said that? The former Auditor General herself, Sheila Fraser.
 [Translation]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is obviously still the same broken record. If, after months of searching, they were not able to find an auditor general who, as the job poster indicated, was proficient in both languages at the time of hiring, it shows what kind of employers the Conservatives are.

When a private company requires comprehension of both official languages, it means that it is a critical competence for undertaking the required work. Why are the Conservatives treating this requirement as a minor detail that can be set aside if it becomes an inconvenience?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government sought bilingual candidates. After a thorough process, the successful candidate was determined to be by far the most qualified. Mr. Ferguson has undertaken to become proficient in both of Canada's official languages and he has already begun training. Mr. Ferguson has a proven track record of public service in the province of New Brunswick, but do not take my word for it, here is a quote:

—what Mike Ferguson will face in Ottawa as opposed to Fredericton will be simply a few extra zeroes at the end of the numbers. The same skills and the same types of experience will count in both jobs.

Who said that? It was the Liberal leader, Victor Boudreau.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the President of the Public Service Commission said that, in the public service, language is an essential requirement. This government continues to tell anyone who will listen that it has nothing against bilingualism and that the Auditor General is perfectly competent, except it has forgotten one important requirement: bilingualism.

Did the government at least take the time to interview him and ask him a few questions in French before offering him the job?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government supports official languages. That is why we allocated over \$1 billion to the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality. This represents an unprecedented investment meant to promote and protect bilingualism across the country.

[English]

In regard to Mr. Ferguson, I have another quote. This comes from the premier of New Brunswick who said:

He's outstanding, he's a leader and, quite frankly, that's one of the reasons why I came to him to become deputy minister of Finance in New Brunswick at certainly a very difficult time in the province's history,

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Raynault (Joliette, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is all well and good to want to favour one's friends instead of choosing the most competent people for essential positions, but when it is done at

the expense of francophones from coast to coast to coast, that is unacceptable. The government cannot play the bilingualism card only when it wants to look good.

Will the government reverse its decision and appoint a bilingual auditor general?

●(1145)

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, this government has done more for official languages than any other government in Canadian history, including investing over \$1 billion in our road map for linguistic duality.

Mr. Ferguson is the most qualified candidate for the job. We have many different people quoted as saying that and we will stand behind our candidate.

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FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to end the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all, and that is exactly what we are doing.

However, members on this side of the House are not the only ones who received that mandate from the people of Canada. Many NDP MPs promised their constituents that if they sent them to this place they would vote to end the long gun registry. However, we have already seen early in this Parliament that many NDP members are breaking their promises to their constituents.

Would the parliamentary secretary please tell the House how she views the decisions of those members opposite?

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Red Deer for the good work he has done in helping us end the long gun registry.

I believe, and I think we all believe, that members must respect and represent the views of the Canadians who sent them here. I find it very disheartening to hear the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley say that the fever has gone down a bit on the gun registry in his riding. Or, the member for Western Arctic, who also campaigned on ending the long gun registry, saying that he thinks it appropriate for provinces to develop their own registry.

Canadians find that sort of hedging unacceptable. When MPs make promises, Canadians expect those promises to be kept. I call on all opposition members—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Vaudreuil-Soulanges.

[*Translation*]

CANADA POST

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulages, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how does the minister explain the unfair treatment of Quebec when it comes to the cuts at Canada Post? The cuts in Quebec are alarming at 53%, when elsewhere in the country they are only 4% to 8%.

How does the minister explain that Quebec is not entitled to the same postal service as the rest of the country?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is a crown corporation that is at arm's length from the government. In fact, all Canadians are entitled to the same service from this corporation, but we will not interfere in the day-to-day management of this organization.

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulages, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary is avoiding questions on the cuts at Canada Post and continuing to give vague answers.

Can the parliamentary secretary finally tell us why Quebec is being so unjustly penalized? Postal service is crucial across the country. Why is this government abandoning Quebec? Quebecers deserve an answer.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, it is the New Democrats who tried to extend a work stoppage at Canada Post. They are the ones who contributed to the interruption of service to Quebecers and all Canadians.

It is our government that took action to ensure that Canada Post's services are available to all Canadians across the country.

[*English*]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canada Post office in Dorion, Ontario is also about to close, forcing families to drive up to 75 kilometres just to pick up a package, that is despite the fact that Canada Post has claimed that there is a moratorium on the closure of rural post offices.

Postal service is vital for rural families and especially seniors in communities like Dorion. They should not need to drive almost an hour just to get to the post office.

Would the minister stand up and assure Dorion families that post offices will not close?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada Post is a crown corporation, independent from the government. It does provide services to Canadians coast to coast. Those services are provided regardless of region and without discrimination. We will not interfere in the daily operations and management of an independent crown corporation.

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what kind of leadership is that?

Oral Questions

Rural Canadian communities, like Dorion, are being left out in the cold by Canada Post. Last year alone, despite its promised moratorium on such closures, Canada Post padlocked postal outlets in 37 different towns. Thousands of families are cut off from the rest of the country, even while Canada Post raked in \$233 million in profit.

When will the minister and the government stand up for rural communities? When will they stop robbing them of their needed postal services?

• (1150)

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we are standing up for rural communities. That is why the government is working to eliminate the wasteful long gun registry that has harassed farmers and hunters for far too long. That is why we are giving freedom to western farmers.

On the subject of Canada Post service, it is a little rich for the NDP, which attempted to prolong the work stoppage at Canada Post, to now stand in the House of Commons and claim that it wants to extend the services. It wanted to prevent Canadians from any region of the country from having Canada Post service by prolonging that work stoppage. Thank goodness our government stepped in and ordered it back to work.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, another week goes by with yet another story about the F-35 procurement unraveling before our very own eyes.

Having bought into the program hook line and sinker, the Minister of National Defence is isolated within his own cabinet. Indeed, it is so bad that the minister now has his own personal babysitter. In short, it is a mess.

What is it that the Minister of National Defence is doing to pull the plug on this program, which is in its own death spiral?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is no intent to pull the plug on an asset that is so critical to Canadian sovereignty and provides our men and women the assets they need well into the future to fulfill their missions and return home safe at the end of those missions to their families.

As well, we are now into cutting steel. This is not a reversal item. This is the right plane, the right aircraft for the right time and well into the future. We made that decision. In fact, the Liberal government of the day in 1997 embarked on this very same project.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, now even the babysitting minister whistles past the graveyard.

Serious countries explore alternative procurement strategies. Indeed, some of them have already pulled out of the program altogether.

Oral Questions

What kind of a minister sticks with a program where he does not even know the final cost? Open procurement is the only answer. Why will the minister not pull out of this program before he crash lands us all?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy here is beyond belief.

That is the same government—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The associate minister has the floor.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, that is the same government of the day that embarked on this very same project and now it has cold feet. That is the same government of the day that sent its men and women into battle in danger zones in Afghanistan, in a desert setting, wearing green uniforms.

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PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week, the Privacy Commissioner sounded alarm bells again, raising serious concerns about the Conservative government's lawful access legislation. The Privacy Commissioner said that Conservatives had not justified the sweeping search and seizure powers they plan to foist on commercial ISPs.

Will the Minister of Public Safety accept the Privacy Commissioner's recommendations and fix the legislation before it is reintroduced?

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be perfectly clear. No legislation proposed in the past, present or future by a Conservative government would allow for police to read emails without a warrant. As technology evolves, many criminal activities, such as the distribution of child pornography, becomes easier and we are proposing measures to bring our laws into the 21st century.

I find it remarkable that the same party that wants to look at the private records of law-abiding gun owners wants to protect potential child pornographers.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that was an answer but not to my question.

This is again about the Privacy Commissioner. The commissioner said that this proposal to hugely expand surveillance and weaken judicial scrutiny went far beyond what is needed. According to the commissioner, better alternatives exist to give police the investigative tools they need while still preserving the privacy of Canadians.

When will the government finally acknowledge these serious privacy concerns and agree to fix the bill?

•(1155)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our proposal will not allow for access to private communications without a warrant. What we are proposing is a balanced approach between checking on those who may be distributing child pornography and the right of individuals to have their information remain private.

We ask the NDP to support this good legislation to get it to the 21st century, but also to support the private records of law-abiding long gun owners in this country.

* * *

TURKEY

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this past Sunday, a large earthquake struck eastern Turkey. Over 600 aftershocks followed the devastating earthquake and reports say that thousands of people have been left homeless.

Under the leadership of our Prime Minister, Canada took a leadership role on the international stage. We are often quick to respond to humanitarian crises around the world.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell the House what Canada's response is to this recent disaster?

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud that this morning the Minister of International Cooperation announced Canada's response to this disaster. Canada stands by the people of Turkey and we offer our support and sympathy to the families and loved ones affected by the tragic earthquake.

We are sending 500 winterized tents to Turkey. The tents will ensure urgently need emergency shelter for 500 families, and we will continue to monitor the situation there.

* * *

GOVERNMENT LOANS

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, some time ago, the Government of Canada and the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador signed an MOU for a loan guarantee covering the Muskrat Falls electrical project. Since then, we have heard nothing.

In our province, commitments from the government are often taken with some degree of skepticism. We wonder if this is really a commitment or is it a scheme to keep the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador in line.

My question is for the minister responsible for Newfoundland and Labrador. Has the government completed its due diligence analysis and is it on time for final approval, or is this just another tactic it is using to keep the provinces in line?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the commitment we made to Muskrat Falls. We will continue to show support. This is a very important economic development project for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and, in fact, for all the people of Atlantic Canada. It offers the prospect of clean energy at low cost and economic development and growth and jobs. That is the focus of our government: economic growth and job creation.

*Oral Questions***PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS COMPENSATION FUND**

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 14 years, Canada's firefighters have been coming to Parliament Hill to ask that their families be taken care of if they die in the line of duty or if they die saving others through a public safety officer compensation fund.

Five years ago, the NDP delivered and we passed legislation through the House directing the government to do this. Since that time, dozens of Canada's firefighters and police officers have passed away and their families are often left destitute. The United States has a fund but Canada does not.

Why will the government not establish a public safety officer compensation fund and why is it showing such profound disrespect to Canada's firefighters and police officers?

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a government that is listening to firefighters and police officers across the country. Not only are we giving police officers the tools they need to do their job, but we also introduced a firefighters volunteer tax credit which has been supported across the country. It is something firefighters asked for. It is helping them. We respect and appreciate the work they do. We will continue to support them.

We ask the opposition to do the same thing. We ask the opposition members to vote for measures that will keep criminals in jail and not out on the street.

* * *

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's top priority is to complete the economic recovery and protect and create Canadian jobs. Broadening and expanding access to more markets, particularly Asia, is a key part of our government's job creating pro-trade plan. Canadians get the jobs, the prosperity and consumer benefits that come from increased trade.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain why the Asia-Pacific gateway is so critical to our job creating pro-trade plan? What is happening to ensure that happens?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's focus is to create jobs and increase prosperity for hard-working Canadians. As part of the Asia-Pacific gateway, our government announced strategic infrastructure projects worth over \$3.5 billion, including federal contributions of over \$1.4 billion.

Our approach is winning praise. For example, Linda Styrk, the port of Seattle's managing director, said: "Canada has done a fabulous job putting together a national strategy to increase the flow of trade and create more jobs". We agree with her.

We will continue to support the Asia-Pacific gateway because it increases trade, creates jobs and boosts overall transportation—

•(1200)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beauport—Limoilou.

[Translation]

TOURISM

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government could end up depriving the Canadian economy of millions of dollars in tourism spinoffs, because tourists from the countries for which Canada requires a visa must go through a completely arbitrary process. Every year, one out of every five visitors is denied entry to the country. There are no clear criteria, guidelines or standards for granting entry.

What is this government doing to make the tourist visa process fairer?

Hon. Maxime Bernier (Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy that my counterpart is interested in tourism. This industry is very important to Canada. I want to say that we are working with the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism to ensure that our visa process is effective. I just got back from China, where I met with my counterparts over there. I can say that Canada has a very competitive process for granting visas to foreign visitors, compared to what is done elsewhere.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Conservatives introduced a bill that would irreversibly decrease Quebec's political weight. The Quebecers in this House have an obligation to object to this assault on the Quebec nation and denounce the bill.

The National Assembly has spoken out three times and Quebec's minister of intergovernmental affairs has made it clear: "...there is an exceptional consensus; Quebec does not want to see its weight decreased."

Will the government respect the Quebec nation and correct its bill in order to maintain Quebec's current political weight?

[English]

Hon. Tim Uppal (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have introduced principled legislation that is fair for all provinces. Quebec has 23% of the population and will have 23% of the seats in the House of Commons.

The fair representation act would bring every single province closer to representation by population. We on this side of the House are governing for all Canadians.

*Routine Proceedings***ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS**

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8), I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's responses to seven petitions.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 8th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

[English]

Pursuant to Standing Order 92(3)(a), the committee hereby reports that it has concurred in the report of the subcommittee on private members' business advising that Bill C-292, An Act to amend the Corrections and Conditional Release Act (victims' restitution and monetary awards for offenders), should be designated non-votable.

* * *

CONDEMNATION OF RUSSIAN CORRUPTION ACT

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-339, An Act to condemn corruption and impunity in Russia in the case and death of Sergei Magnitsky.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a bill entitled an act to condemn corruption and impunity in Russia in the case and death of Sergei Magnitsky.

The tragic torture and death in detention of Russian lawyer Sergei Magnitsky, who uncovered the largest tax fraud in Russian history and paid for it with his life, is a looking glass into the pervasive culture of corruption and impunity implicating senior government officials in Russia today.

The bill notes that no objective official investigation has been conducted by the Russian government into the Magnitsky case, despite extensive documented evidence incriminating Russian officials in serious human rights violations, in the embezzlement of funds from the Russian treasury, and in the retaliation against Mr. Magnitsky, nor have the individual persons been identified, apprehended and brought to justice in Russia.

Accordingly, this bill establishes a process by which the Canadian government must prepare a list of individuals responsible for the torture and death of Sergei Magnitsky, for the conspiracy to defraud the Russian federation of taxes paid by the foreign investment company known as Hermitage, and for efforts to shield those culpable of those gross violations of human rights. It imposes restrictions on the listed individuals and their family members, such that they are inadmissible for the purposes of entering or remaining in Canada.

The ongoing impunity, and indeed, in this instance shocking impunity, regarding Russian officials is as scandalous as it is shocking. This legislation would uphold the rule of law, would assure Russian human rights defenders that they are not alone, would protect Canadian business interests in Russia, and in particular would remember and honour the heroic sacrifice of Sergei Magnitsky. He acted on behalf of all of us in his protection of the rule of law.

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed)

* * *

● (1205)

PETITIONS

PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure of presenting a petition on behalf of the residents of Rossport, Terrace Bay and Schreiber in support of restoring vital passenger rail service that was cut in the late 1980s.

The petitioners note that rail is both environmentally friendly and efficient. Returning passenger rail to one of the most spectacular routes in the country, along the north shore of Lake Superior through Thunder Bay, would be a huge boost to north shore communities and to rail tourism alike.

The petitioners are asking for MPs to support Motion No. 263 to return passenger rail along the beautiful north shore of Lake Superior to Thunder Bay and beyond.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I present a petition in which 30 Canadians from Saskatchewan and Ontario want the government to ensure the Holodomor and Canada's first national internment operations are permanently and prominently displayed at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights in Winnipeg.

SHARK FINS

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present petitions with 753 signatures from across Canada. The petitions were started by people within Saanich—Gulf Islands who are concerned about the fate of sharks globally because of the single practice of killing the shark to obtain the fin to make shark fin soup.

Earlier this week, Toronto City Council took decisive action and voted at the municipal level, as many other municipalities are now doing, to ban shark fins. This petition asks that this House look at the issue. I hope that we will also see a private member's bill on this matter.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS****QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS**

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 133, 135 and 137 could be made orders for returns, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 133—**Ms. Megan Leslie:**

With regard to Table 2-16 in the 2008 Greenhouse Gas Inventory produced by Environment Canada and submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change: (a) what are the corresponding sector by sector greenhouse gas emission figures for 2009; (b) has the government revised any of the greenhouse gas emissions estimates from the years included in the above-mentioned Table 2-16, and if so why; and (c) do the oil sands sector figures reported for each year included in the above-mentioned Table 2-16 include the indirect emissions resulting from the electricity used in oil sands facilities, transportation of the oil, refining, and from any associated land use changes or deforestation, and if they are not included (i) why are they not included, (ii) what is the government's estimate for what they would be?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 135—**Ms. Megan Leslie:**

With respect to the business-as-usual Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission projections for Canada, last published in 2008: (a) what are the government's 2011 GHG emission projections for the years 2015 and 2020, disaggregated by source of emission and by sector, including, with respect to the oilsands sector, the GHG emissions related to in-situ bitumen mining, bitumen mining and upgrading; and (b) what are macroeconomics assumptions, data on demand by industry for electricity and energy, petroleum supply and distribution, natural gas supply and disposition, conversion and emission factors and other assumptions that these business-as-usual GHG emissions projections are based upon?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 137—**Ms. Libby Davies:**

With regard to recommendation number seven of the Report of the Standing Committee on Health, tabled on June 17, 2010, titled “Promoting Innovative Solutions to Health Human Resources Challenges”: (a) what is the government's position with respect to physiotherapy as a method to reduce health care spending while increasing the capacity of Canadian physicians; (b) what is the government's position with respect to a pan-Canadian increase in direct access to physiotherapy services without gate-keeper consultation from physicians; (c) what is the Treasury Board's position with respect to allowing employees of the federal public service and members of the federal client groups, including, First Nations and Inuit, RCMP, veterans, immigrants and refugees, federal inmates, and members of the Canadian Forces, to have direct access to physiotherapists, without gate-keeper consultation from physicians?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

ENDING THE LONG-GUN REGISTRY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, to finish my speech, I would like to mention two main things about Bill C-19, or two arguments that have been repeated and that need to be corrected.

My first point—and we agree with the government—is that the cost of initially implementing the registry—over \$2 billion—was far greater than what was planned and announced by the Liberal government in office at the time. The cost of implementing the registry was staggering. However, the registry now exists. I found it interesting that the member for Cariboo—Prince George was asked a question by a member of his own party about the annual costs. He was unable to respond. I can say that the current costs are minimal compared to the program's contribution. The registry currently exists. We can use it.

It is a little bit like if someone decides to renovate his or her basement. That individual is told that the renovations will cost \$10,000 but, in the end, they actually cost \$50,000. Will the person completely scrap the renovations because they cost too much? No. That person will work with what they have got. The fact that the registry initially cost a lot of money—\$2 billion—does not justify eliminating it. That does not make any sense. The registry currently exists. The operating costs are minimal, and the registry has many benefits, as I mentioned in my speech before question period.

The second point that I would like to make is that the Conservatives have now decided that abolishing the registry means that all the data must be destroyed, even though the provinces—Quebec, among others—want to keep this data to manage their own program. The Conservatives are saying that they mentioned doing this in their election campaign, but I honestly did not hear anything about it.

Government Orders

The hon. member for Beauce said that this falls under federal jurisdiction, but justice is a shared jurisdiction. The Criminal Code does fall under federal jurisdiction, but the administration of justice comes under provincial jurisdiction and, as far as I know, the Sûreté du Québec does not fall under federal jurisdiction. So now we should all be able to agree. The NDP did its part to search for a middle ground between the government, which wants to completely abolish the long gun registry, and those who want to keep it, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. Such groups suggest, and rightfully so, that the registry is used repeatedly and regularly. Many of my colleagues have made that argument. I know that the police forces in my riding of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques use it. I know they use it especially frequently in cases where there is a risk of domestic violence. This argument cannot be casually dismissed, which is what government members so often like to do.

The firearms registry should be amended to eliminate the sticking points that we have mentioned, that we continue to mention and that I talked about before question period. Those sticking points can be eliminated. My constituents in Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques have said that corrections must be made, including decriminalizing a first offence when someone fails to comply with the registration requirement. There are other sticking points. The NDP is prepared to sit down with the government to eliminate them and ensure that the registry continues in the same direction.

This is an important policy issue. This is not a trivial matter or delay tactic, but rather a fundamental issue concerning Canada's social fabric. That is why we want to work with the government to amend Bill C-19, but we will not be voting in favour of this bill in its current form.

•(1210)

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really enjoyed the hon. member's speech. When we talk about the firearms registry, I think back to the time when I worked at a furniture and appliance store, Ameublements Tanguay. A number of my colleagues were hunters. Some told me they felt as though they were being treated like criminals. I was aware of this type of argument.

We have to remember that at the time of the previous crisis, triggered by this government, with regard to this very registry, Mr. Layton had proposed, both within our caucus and to the government, that there be some sort of arrangement so that people who have to register their firearms could do so in a dignified manner without being labelled as potential criminals. I would like the hon. member to elaborate on this and to reach out to the government so that we can find a solution that suits everyone.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question, which touches on something I wanted to expand on. This allows me to do so.

Members have talked about hunters, gun owners, being treated like potential criminals. The hon. members opposite who use that argument are making allegations that make absolutely no sense. We all know gun owners, people who own shotguns, and we do not think of them as potential criminals in any way.

This argument is as misleading as saying that because we need to register our vehicle—vehicle registration is important because, among other things, it gives the police a way of tracking people who commit hit-and-run offences—all drivers are potential criminals. That makes no sense. We know that most firearm owners are law-abiding citizens who will not commit any crime.

However, we have to acknowledge that some crimes are committed by people with shotguns. As I was saying with regard to domestic violence, 88% of the spousal homicides committed with a firearm are committed with a shotgun. Accordingly, to say there is no justification for this registry because the facts are not there to support it is false; the statistics prove it. There is a prevention effort and the registry truly helps police forces do their work.

•(1215)

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member a question.

We are talking about a registry for firearms and hunting rifles. A semi-automatic hunting rifle with a magazine of 30 bullets is nothing to laugh at. I do not think that a duck being shot at will turn into a dive bomber and attack the hunter. I do not think that a deer will turn into a tank and crush the hunter. Clearly, long guns include weapons that are not hunting rifles but weapons of war. Currently, it is acceptable to own a semi-automatic weapon with a magazine of 30 bullets, which is exactly what was used at the École Polytechnique in Montreal. It was a combat weapon.

I would like to know how these combat weapons will be controlled if we get rid of the registry.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his question. He raises a valid point. That is why we need to work with the government to eliminate these irritants and ensure that the usefulness of this registry is being taken into account as well. The government seems to be ignoring that aspect.

The Conservative Party strategy since 2006—and even before then, since we are talking about the creation of the registry—has been to polarize debate, to say that it is entirely one thing or the other, black or white, for or against. The registry involves much more nuanced issues, and they have not been debated in society. Obviously, that has benefited the Conservatives and their fundraisers.

However, the societal issues and technical issues have been removed from the debate. That debate has not taken place in the House. My colleague from Burnaby—Douglas mentioned that, since 2006, there have been exactly three hours of debate on this issue. That is why we are calling on the Conservative government to work with us to eliminate the irritants and ensure that the positive aspects of the registry can be maintained.

Government Orders

[English]

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to Bill C-19, the ending the long gun registry bill.

It has been interesting to hear the different debates in the House over the last few days. Two years ago my colleague, the member for Portage—Lisgar, introduced a private member's bill, Bill C-391, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act (repeal of long-gun registry), which was defeated by a mere two votes in the last Parliament, against the express wishes of responsible Canadian gun owners.

Although my medical practice and home are located in the wonderful riding of Simcoe—Grey, I was born and raised in the west, in Fort McMurray in northern Alberta, and Brandon, Manitoba. Both are areas of the country that have given me a deep appreciation of the quality of life in rural Canada, as does my own riding.

My grandfather was an avid duck hunter as well as a farmer. Today he would be heartened to know that our government stands on the side of law-abiding firearms owners, including farmers, duck hunters and rural Canadians in every region of the country.

In my riding of Simcoe—Grey we are fortunate to have many retired seniors from regions all across the country who have made our riding their home. Many of them have moved from northern Ontario and rural regions across the country where hunting, fishing and sport shooting are common practice.

My constituency is also fortunate to have many members of the farming community, whether that be the Beattie family, the McNabb family or Tom Walsh, the mayor of Adjala.

Members of the community use long guns as one of the main tools to keep their property and livestock safe from coyotes, foxes and other vermin.

When we put it all together it means that there is a great number of my constituents who care very passionately about the long gun registry. It is something that I heard about repeatedly as I went door to door in the last election from Creemore to Stayner to Loretto. It continues to be something my constituents take extremely seriously. My office has literally been getting hundreds of letters on the issue.

Make no mistake, my constituents are expecting the government to deliver on its commitment to scrap the long gun registry. That is what we intend to do.

Clearly this is an issue that brings out strong emotions in people. We have heard passionate arguments from members across the floor. While I respect their passion I also point out that many of the facts are simply wrong.

One of the points we have heard from the opposition is that the long gun registry saves lives. We are told it prevents crimes and violence. We are told that having it in place makes people safer.

These statements are not only incorrect but also create a false sense of security where it should not exist. Registering a long gun does not prevent it from being used in a violent manner. I recognized

this when I saw injured people come through the emergency department regularly when I worked as a resident at Sunnybrook Health Sciences Centre.

The long gun registry does not prevent crimes from happening. The opposition members have cited many tragic examples of gun crimes that have happened over the past years. The registry did nothing to prevent those crimes. Those crimes took place despite having the long gun registry.

In addition, the registry is not an effective method of gun control. Gun control occurs through the licensing process, which has nothing to do with the long gun registry.

The registry is not an effective tool for law enforcement, to prevent crime or to target criminals. All it does is make criminals out of law-abiding gun owners. Considering its \$2 billion cost to date, that is simply not an effective use of taxpayers' dollars.

The long gun registry was one of the key issues of concern to my constituents during the last election. It was an issue upon which the government was clear, that Bill C-19 will ensure that the government ends the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry once and for all.

Bill C-19 includes two important components. It will end the requirement that compels law-abiding long gun owners to register their non-restricted firearms, notably long guns. People wishing to acquire a firearm or ammunition will be required to undergo a background check for a criminal record by the issuer of the licence, pass a firearms safety course and comply with all firearms safe storage and transportation requirements.

The bill will allow the government to end the practice of criminalizing Canadian hunters, farmers and sport shooters for engaging in a way of life that is part of what we view as the fabric of this country.

Bill C-19 also ensures that the records of the registry will be destroyed. We have heard members of the opposition suggest in no uncertain terms that the data that was collected for the purpose of the long gun registry should be shared among the provinces so that they can set up their own registry if they so choose.

• (1220)

When our government made the commitment to scrap the long gun registry there was no caveat. We did not promise to rid Canadians of the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry only to facilitate its creation elsewhere. We said we would scrap the registry. We will do that and we will destroy the records.

What has become increasingly clear over the past few days is that should the NDP ever gain power it would have no qualm about resurrecting the long gun registry. I know that runs counter to the wishes of many of the NDP members' constituents in many of the rural ridings they represent. I cannot imagine turning my back on my constituents in the manner that they are now suggesting.

Government Orders

Canadians gave our government a strong mandate to keep focused on the economy and keep our streets and communities safer. While we are working to fulfill our promise to scrap the long gun registry, we are also continuing to work to deliver safer streets, better jobs and a better future for Canadians. We made a clear point in the last campaign to eliminate the long gun registry. A failure to follow through on that clear promise would only undermine the faith Canadians have in the political system, many of whom already have doubts in the willingness of politicians to live up to their commitments. I am proud to be part of a government that respects its promises, delivers on its commitments and stands for the things that matter to Canadians across the country.

That is why I am proud today to stand in support of Bill C-19. To be clear it is wasteful, ineffective and does not prevent crime. It targets Canadians such as my constituents in Simcoe—Grey who are law-abiding long gun owners. It is time for that to end. I hope that hon. members opposite will take it into due consideration and join the government in its effort to scrap the long gun registry once and for all.

• (1225)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I said to an African friend of mine—from Mali, in fact—do not cry over spilled milk.

Two billion dollars was spent to create this registry. Now it is working, or at least it could be if the government did not take every opportunity to undermine it. For five years, this government has done everything possible to keep the gun registry from being efficient and useful. It is like a car owner who refuses to do an oil change or any maintenance and drives around with a flat.

How can my colleague have been complicit in this all along and now justify the destruction of this registry?

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, we have been extremely clear. We made it clear to our constituents that we will scrap the long gun registry. Unlike the members opposite, whether that be Charlie Angus or Malcolm Allen, who said that they would—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. I am sure I do not have to remind the parliamentary secretary to refer to members by their ridings and not their names.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, whether it be the member for Timmins—James Bay or the member for Welland, these individuals said they would scrap the registry and then flip-flopped.

We stand by our promise to stand with law-abiding farmers, duck hunters and rural Canadians in every region of the country and scrap the long gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté: Mr. Speaker, only a fool does not change his mind.

What I find really unreasonable is that we have been making suggestions for a long time. Our late leader made them. When we speak directly to gun owners, users, these are measures that seem

perfectly reasonable to them. I have hunter friends who got emotional when they told me that they hated the process of answering questions that practically made them seem like potential criminals. That makes sense and we are aware of that. That is why my colleagues here supported our leader and eventually rejected the bogus private member's bill that had been introduced at the time by this government.

[*English*]

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, I take exception to being called a fool in the House of Commons and await the member's apology in response.

As I mentioned, we will be scrapping the long gun registry. We are standing behind the law-abiding farmers, duck hunters and individuals who use long guns for sport unlike those NDP members, whether it be the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, the member for Sudbury or the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, all of whom said they would scrap the registry and have now flip-flopped.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was present in the public accounts committee when the Auditor General brought in her report and talked about the flawed nature of the data that was in the report. My colleague's profession previous to coming to the House of Commons was that of a physician. She might want to elaborate on just how dangerous it is to try and deal with flawed data as a professional. In this case, of course, I am talking about law enforcement agencies. Maybe she could allude to the fact that data is still available for licensing.

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, evidence-based data is data we can act on. In the case of what my colleague had commented on, this data is not clean data. It is not data that can be utilized in an effective manner.

As I also mentioned in my speech, data does not save lives. Those individuals who need to be accountable, who are causing the grief on our streets, and the reason why patients end up in emergency, are not the law-abiding long gun owners we are dealing with here. They are criminals who need to be taken off of our streets.

In this case, we are standing up for those law-abiding duck hunters, farmers, and individuals who are just carrying on with their daily lives, like my constituents in Simcoe—Grey. They are very different from those criminals on the street that we need to ensure are taken into custody.

Government Orders

• (1230)

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me the opportunity to join in the debate. I rise more in sadness than in anger, given that during some of the time of the development of the registry I was the solicitor general of Ontario responsible for this file. I was very supportive, as was the government that I was a member of. I understand the background and why this was brought about. I understand, accept and agree with the ultimate goals of why this was brought in.

However, what is probably most disappointing is the government's continuing propensity to find issues that are wedge issues and pit one region or province against the other in Canada. Much of the debate here is really about the differences in the lifestyles of people in the various parts of Canada. Demonizing on either side, quite frankly, is not helpful if the purpose is to build a better, stronger Canada and in this case, a better, stronger, safer Canada.

Jack Layton invested a lot of his political currency in this file. This has been read into the record, but I wish to read it into the record again during my submission today. These are the words of Jack Layton, our former leader. In August 2010 he said:

Stopping gun violence has been a priority for rural and urban Canadians. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to sit down with good will and open minds. There's no good reason why we shouldn't be able to build solutions that bring us together. But that sense of shared purpose has been the silent victim of the gun registry debate.

[The Prime Minister] has been no help at all. Instead of driving for solutions, he has used this issue to drive wedges between Canadians...[The Conservatives] are stoking resentments as a fundraising tool to fill their election war chest. [The Prime Minister] is pitting Canadian region against Canadian region with his "all or nothing show-down".

This is un-Canadian. This kind of divisiveness, pitting one group against another is the poisonous politics of the United States. Not the nation-building politics of Canada.

When the issue came up, Jack was under incredible pressure to whip the vote because of his strong advocacy to diminish and eliminate violence of all sort, particularly domestic violence and violence against women. Had the registry gone down on that vote, his legacy would not have been the proud one that he ended his life with.

The cornerstone of Jack Layton's political life was respect. He made proposals for changes to recognize and respect the legitimate concerns of women in the country who are seeing far too many other women being killed at the hands of their own partners using guns.

Also, to be fair, the lifestyle in the northern parts of our country is different. I have been privileged enough to be in the high Arctic, to stand in the Northwest Passage. It does not take long to understand that there is a whole different life there, as in rural areas of our provinces and in the extreme corners of our provinces. We are so big that these regional issues are tensions that we deal with all the time.

What upset Jack the most was a government that was deliberately willing to exacerbate those built-in natural tensions that are part of trying to govern Canada given the extremities and differences that exist in how we live our daily lives in this country.

Therefore, it is much more with sadness than anger that I rise. I only have a few minutes, so I will say what I can in the short time that I have.

• (1235)

However, in terms of defending why the registry should stay, under any other circumstance, the debate for the government would begin and end with this one quote:

The registry gives officers information that keeps them safe. If the registry is taken from us, police officers may guess, but they cannot know. It could get them killed.

That was said by the chief of police in Toronto, Chief William Blair, who also happens to be the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

There is not just one quote. Here is another:

Scrapping the federal Firearms Registry will put our officers at risk and undermine our ability to prevent and solve crimes.

That quote is from Chief Daniel Parkinson, who is also the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

Now, under any other circumstance, if two prominent police chiefs, heads of national and provincial organizations, were to come out with statements like that, that would automatically be the policy of the government. Yet, here we are, in this bizarre situation where the Conservative government, whose members do everything they can to wear the brand of law and order, is going against the advice of the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and, in the case of my province, the president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police.

We will hear members who get up to talk about some rank and file members make comments like this. But make no mistake, under any other condition, the government would recognize that while these chiefs are not on the front line anymore, they are the individuals who we task with making the decisions about which of our officers, and when, put themselves in harm's way. Sometimes it is harder for commanders to put somebody else's life at risk than it is to put their own life at risk.

Here are these chiefs who have to make those soul-searing decisions, saying, "Please don't do this". To quote Chief Blair, "It could get them killed".

In my view, there would not be a need for any further debate in the real world. But we are in this place and it is different.

I realize my time is going to run out, so I am just going to keep going for two minutes.

This is a quote from the federal victims' ombudsman, Sue O'Sullivan:

Though there are varying points of view, the majority of victims' groups we have spoken with continue to support keeping the long-gun registry.

It is interesting. The government members always talk about caring about victims, just like they always talk about caring about our soldiers, but they are great in the rhetoric. We hear the "Hear, hear?" and meeting soldiers. They stand and start saluting all over the place.

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However, the reality is that it has been the NDP that has been standing up for those soldiers when they come back here and are no longer there for the parades and the send-offs. It has been our caucus members who have stood up for the plight of ordinary veterans who are living in poverty and facing all kinds of medical challenges. The government is not responding to them.

This is the same issue. We have the police chiefs on the one hand, we have our federal victims' ombudsman on the other, both saying, "Do not get rid of this registry, please, in the interests of the women in our society and in the interests of the officers we ask to go out and protect us day to day".

The argument should be straightforward. It is for us on this side. We will continue to press to preserve this. I do not have any time to talk about the scorched earth policy of eliminating all the data. Maybe we can get into that in Q and As.

● (1240)

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the member is practising for a movie role or not, but I suppose he does not have to deal with facts when he is just trying to display his oratorical skills.

That party is the most hypocritical party that we have ever seen in the House, because those members have voted against every anti-crime bill that this government has put forward, and now they have the audacity to stand up in the House and support a gun registry that does not mean diddly to any person with a criminal intent to use a gun, whether it has a registered number on it or not.

For goodness' sake, millions of illegal firearms are used in the majority of crimes every single day all across the country. The people using those firearms do not care whether they are registered or not, and the police, before they go to a scene, train themselves to anticipate that there could be a firearm involved whether there is a gun registry or not.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I am sure there was an important point in that rant.

The member wants facts. How much more factual do we have to get than the chief of police of Toronto, who is the president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police? We are not just making something up.

I made the point in my remarks, and I meant it, that under any other circumstance the Conservatives would be standing up and quoting what police chiefs are saying when it comes to fighting crime and keeping Canadians safe. We are quoting the most prominent police chiefs in Canada, yet the Conservatives are accusing us of playing some kind of game.

I would ask the member to look seriously in the mirror in terms of who is playing games with Canadians' safety.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech just given by the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey, and I noted two things in particular that I would like my colleague to comment on.

The member is a doctor and she just said that data do not save lives. Her statement is based on everyday data from her traditional

job. I do not really understand how she can say that data, including the data found in the registry, cannot save lives. On the contrary, the information does save lives and can be used for prevention.

I would like to tell my colleague about a comment my team heard at La Débrouille, a women's shelter for victims of domestic violence in Rimouski-Neigette. Someone at the shelter said that when an abused woman seeks shelter with them, if she presses charges of course, the police consult the registry to see if weapons could pose a risk in a case of domestic violence. The shelter for abused women said that it sends at least one request a day to the Rimouski-Neigette police. We are talking about at least one call a day from one women's shelter alone, which is located in just one of Canada's 308 ridings.

In light of that comment from the women's shelter, can we not agree that the registry contains information that could be useful across the country, especially in cases of domestic violence?

[*English*]

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right about the importance of the registry.

We can debate what we think happens when police officers pull up in front of a place. We can debate what we think all of this means, but let us remember what the leadership of the police community in Canada is saying. Let us also recognize that as of September 30, 2011, the Canadian firearms registry was accessed 17,402 times a day. If even one of those relates to my daughter, then I would rather be on the side of safety and have the information, because the opposite is what we currently have.

We recognize that there are different pressures and viewpoints from around the country on how to view this issue, but we are trying to see it from the victim's point of view, from the community's point of view, from the point of view of the police leadership in Canada. We are trying to put forward the fact that the registry makes a difference and it ought to stay. Women in Canada deserve to have this registry in place, and they deserve to know that their Parliament cares about them and their lives.

● (1245)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today to speak to Bill C-19, the ending the long-gun registry act. My colleagues have spoken very passionately about the need to end this wasteful and ineffective registry, and I am very glad that the moment has arrived when we are actually able to do so.

[*Translation*]

Since my election in 2006, I have clearly stated to my constituents that I do not support the long gun registry, because it criminalizes farmers, hunters and target shooters who respect the law, but does nothing to prevent criminals from getting their hands on firearms.

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[English]

I intend to keep my promise to scrap it, which is more than I can say for the NDP and Liberal MPs from rural ridings, who have long spoken about wanting to end the long gun registry but who vote to continue it whenever they are asked to take a stand on the matter. I will do as I said, as will my Conservative colleagues, and we will abolish this Liberal bureaucratic mess that infringes on the freedoms of Canadians.

[Translation]

As members may know, I represent a rural riding where farming is a way of life. Farmers make a living from the land and they have to protect their livelihoods. That means that a majority of the people who I represent own shotguns or rifles to safeguard their livelihoods.

The thrust of the problem is that these hard-working, law-abiding people who grow food for all Canadians are made to feel like dangerous criminals because of the long gun registry.

[English]

This long gun registry's criminalization of farmers, hunters and sport shooters is wrong. How is it possible that imposing needless and extensive red tape on these people is going to stop crime elsewhere? What is the connection between regulating the long gun in the hands of a farmer in my riding and stopping gun crime in Toronto, Montreal or Winnipeg? There is absolutely none, and what is worse is that the resources being used to administer the long gun registry could be used elsewhere to actually fight crime and protect victims.

This issue of the long gun registry demonstrates clearly the fundamental disconnect between opposition MPs and rural Canadians, and Canadians see this disconnect. Canadians elected Conservative members of Parliament on May 2, including, notably, not a single Liberal MP from a rural riding in Ontario. It is not hard to see why. Former Liberal minister of justice Allan Rock, the individual who implemented the long gun registry on behalf of his Liberal government, stated that "Only the police and military should have firearms". This is a ludicrous statement.

Let us take my situation, for example. As the House knows, I served in the Canadian army for 20 years. During that time, I was trained for, carried and fired guns of all description: pistols, rifles, light machine guns, heavy machine guns, automatic grenade launchers, et cetera. I also trained other soldiers in their safe operation and acted in the capacity of range safety officer on many occasions.

The Liberal position enunciated by Allan Rock would be that despite all of this training, experience and responsibility, now that I am retired, I should have no access to firearms as a hunter or sport shooter and, to make it worse, I should be criminalized by the long gun registry if, for whatever reason, I missed a long gun registration deadline, even if it was not my fault.

This situation must change, and I am very pleased and proud that we now have the opportunity to change it.

[Translation]

I would also like to draw attention to a statement made by the hon. member for Mount Royal to the effect that destroying the long gun registry is synonymous with destroying evidence. Since I am a generous man, I will assume he misspoke. I say this because, interestingly enough, his statement implies that Canadians living in rural areas are criminals about whom evidence must be gathered, whether or not they have committed a crime. We on this side of the House fundamentally disagree with this attitude of the opposition members.

Hunters, farmers and sport shooters are not the people that we need to target if we want to keep our streets and communities free from gun-related violence. We need to target criminals and continue with the practical and concrete measures that the Conservative government has taken in this regard—measures that, I should add, the opposition has rejected. The opposition parties are speaking out against anti-crime measures that work and they are firmly supporting those that do not.

• (1250)

[English]

It is clear to the experts that safer streets and communities come from tough, effective laws and from smart crime prevention programming. Our government has taken concrete actions in both of these areas. Whether it is through increasing sentences for crimes involving guns, increasing sentences for gang crime, putting more police on the streets, or improving investments in crime prevention, our government believes in effective crime-fighting measures.

These are the kinds of measures that keep Canadians safe, not increasing bureaucracy, paperwork and red tape on law-abiding Canadians, with the threat of a criminal record if they do not.

Members need not take my word for it. Let me read the following quote: "The federal government has recently introduced a bill to end the long gun registry introduced by the Liberals in the mid-1990s. University of Ottawa criminologist Ron Melchers said the registry has had little to do with the decline in firearm homicides, adding that its absence will also make little difference".

This is what the experts are saying.

I would also like to address a common inaccuracy used by the NDP and the Liberals. They say we register cars and boats, so why not guns? The fact of the matter is that if I am late filling out the paperwork to register my car, I get a small fine, but if I am late filling out the paperwork to register my shotgun, under the current system I am threatened with being charged, convicted, given a criminal record and perhaps being sent to jail.

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Another point about the registration of cars and boats is that we only have to register them if we are going to use them. We can store a car in the backyard or garage and leave it unregistered for as long as we want. It is only once we start using that car that it has to be registered. However, if I store a long gun in a locked storage container in my basement and I do not look at it for 15 years, it has to be registered that whole time, or else I am committing a criminal act under the present long gun registry.

[*Translation*]

Turning law-abiding sport shooters, farmers and hunters in rural regions into criminals is not an effective means of gun control.

The bill before the House today is, in fact, very simple. It makes it possible for this government to do exactly what it promised—to abolish the expensive and ineffective long gun registry. It is not complicated. Members simply need to vote for or against it. Are they in favour of imposing useless bureaucracy on farmers because of their occupation? Are they in favour of treating hunters like criminals simply because they own firearms?

[*English*]

I know where my constituents stand, and that is why I will be voting to support the ending the long gun registry act. I call on all members opposite to do the same.

They need not listen just to me. The NDP member for Western Arctic said, “They say [the long gun registry] is effective, but effective for what?”

The NDP member for Timmins—James Bay said, “What rural people were concerned with is wasting money tracking down your grandfather’s 20-gauge rifle as opposed to putting money into urban gun violence”.

Many similar statements have been made by both NDP and Liberal MPs who are members of the House today. It is my hope that they will reflect on the words that they themselves have spoken, that they will represent the will of their constituents and that when the time comes to vote, they will do the right thing, stand in their place and vote to end the expensive and ineffective long gun registry, which has criminalized responsible and law-abiding Canadians for far too long.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again we have some unfounded allegations from the government and its stakeholders.

I think we on this side, as do government members, realize that no one in this House thinks hunters and farmers are criminals. What the member just spoke about, the fact that a person becomes a criminal if he does not register, are things that the NDP tried to eliminate in the bill it introduced last year. We tried to eliminate the irritants and we can still do so.

The member who just spoke also indicated that the issue is all black or white, either you are for it or against it, when reality is somewhere in the middle. I would like to know why the member who just spoke will not agree to work with the NDP to create a bill that could eliminate the irritants but would still help police forces do

their job. The arguments made by my colleague from Hamilton were very clear: police forces need the registry and use it regularly.

• (1255)

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, the question is simple: why does the NDP refuse to work with the government to abolish the long gun registry?

The registry does not work and does not help police officers fight crime. We need to implement measures that will help them. Every time this government tries to do so, the NDP votes against it. When we try to include more money and resources in the budget for police forces, the NDP votes against it.

I do not know if my colleague comes from a rural riding, but if that is the case, I am almost positive that some of the farmers and hunters in his riding would like to see the long gun registry abolished.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Harris (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, front-line police officers have told me that because there are so many illegal and unregistered firearms, whenever they attend a domestic violence situation, even if there is no record of any firearms being in that resident, they always treat it like there could be one in the residence.

Therefore, previous members’ statements are contrary to what the police chiefs have said. Could my hon. colleague verify comments that he may have heard regarding police preparedness training when they are going into a domestic violence situation?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux: Mr. Speaker, I have spoken to police officers in my riding and they have expressed exactly the same concern. They treat all situations as high-risk situations. They have no confidence in the gun registry because the gun registry is riddled with errors. The gun registry may show that there is a gun in a home when in fact there is not or it may show that there is no gun in a home, when in fact there is. They have no confidence in it, so they treat all situations as high-risk situations.

I will just take a moment to point out what I see to be quite logical.

When a crime is committed with a long gun that has been registered with the long gun registry, it is quite evident that the crime was not prevented by the registry. The registry has failed in preventing that crime from occurring with a registered long gun.

When a crime is committed with a long gun that has not been registered for whatever reason with the registry, it is quite obvious that, once again, the long gun registry has failed to stop that crime with the non-registered long gun.

I really must put this back to my opposition colleagues. They keep saying how effective the long gun registry is in preventing crime, yet I have given two opposite examples that show that the registry has no role to play in preventing crime. They must answer that question because the long gun registry oppresses law-abiding Canadians and law-abiding Canadians are the ones who register their guns, not the criminals.

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[Translation]

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today in the House to debate Bill C-19. Once again, the Conservatives are showing their narrow ideology in trying to eliminate the Canadian firearms registry. This registry is strongly defended by our police forces and by the majority of Canadians, but this government is choosing once again to ignore reality.

The arguments in favour of this bill are not very convincing, while there are many arguments against the bill that are backed by data and by groups that work in protecting Canadians. Yes, the initial cost of the registry was exorbitant, but it has already been paid for by Canadian taxpayers. Abolishing the registry will not bring back the billions of dollars that have already been spent. According to the RCMP, abolishing the registry would result in direct savings of just a few thousand dollars. That is what the lives of the thousands of people saved by this registry are worth to the Conservatives. If this government claims to want to destroy the registry to save money, then to them, a life is worth nothing. This so-called savings is nothing compared to the unavoidable increase in the cost of police investigations that will result from abolishing this registry. In other words, the Conservatives' main argument for wanting to abolish the registry is simply ridiculous.

The other argument frequently used by the Conservatives for destroying the registry is that it is supposedly ineffective. This argument does not hold water. Police forces, as we have said a number of times today, consult the registry more than 17,000 times a day and want the registry to be maintained. It allows police officers to plan their operations better when they have to intervene with individuals, which contributes to the safety of our police forces. The registry also helps reduce the cost of police investigations. When a long gun is used in a crime, police officers can easily track the firearm and its user.

The registry has also helped save many lives. Even though the majority of murders are committed with handguns, long guns are used in the majority of spousal murders and suicides in which firearms are involved.

Various women's advocacy associations want the registry to be maintained. Year after year, long guns are used in two out of every three murders when firearms are involved. The registry has greatly helped diminish the number of spousal murders. For example, only a third as many spousal murders were committed with long guns in 2007 as in 1996, despite the population growth, which shows the usefulness of the registry.

These long guns wreak even more havoc on Canadian society when we consider suicide. Year after year, close to 60% of firearms suicides are committed with long guns. The registry makes it possible to quickly determine if, for example, a depressed person owns a firearm, which allows authorities to save many lives. The number of firearms suicides dropped from 569 in 2001 to 475 in 2004, proving once again that the registry works.

Since we know that most homicides committed with firearms are suicides, it is of the utmost importance for the government to take action. However, this government is irresponsible and would rather ignore the facts and introduce a bill that will lead to the death of

hundreds of Canadians. The survivors of the various massacres that have occurred in Canada also want the registry to be maintained.

On one hand, the Conservatives say that they are on the side of victims of crime but, on the other hand, the Conservatives ignore and turn their backs on those victims when they take a stand that does not correspond with the Conservative ideology. This government is illogical. The Conservatives say that they want to make our streets safer by imposing repressive bills and, yet, they want to allow the free circulation of firearms. This clearly shows that there is something fundamentally wrong with the Conservative ideology.

• (1300)

In addition, one of the main reasons that there are problems with the registry is that the Conservatives did not enforce the legislation. By giving offenders amnesty since 2006, the government has been sending the message that the laws pertaining to the registry are not important and that the Conservative government supports offenders. As a result, millions of firearms are still not registered. What credibility does this irresponsible government have when it states that the registry is ineffective given that it is directly responsible for the problems with the registry?

The Conservatives have done nothing but sabotage the registry since 2006. This government claims to want to enforce the laws but, instead, it is sending the message that only the laws that are consistent with the Conservative ideology have to be respected. Unfortunately, that is not all. Many provinces, including Quebec, are insisting that the registry be maintained and, yet, the Conservatives are completely ignoring them. This government would rather completely destroy the registry instead of giving the data to the provinces. This shows the contempt that the Conservatives have for our constituents.

Must we remind this government that every Canadian paid for this registry, not just the Conservatives or the Conservative Party?

The people of the provinces that want to keep the firearms registry paid to create it. Are they not entitled to keep what they paid for? The Conservatives, blinded by their regressive ideology, absolutely want to destroy the registry without giving the data to the provinces. These same provinces will have to waste our money to recreate a registry from scratch. The Conservatives are showing their contempt for the provinces, especially Quebec, where 84% of voters voted against the Conservative Party. In fact, a motion was adopted yesterday by the National Assembly of Quebec calling on the federal government to transfer the firearms registry data to the Government of Quebec.

Another argument used by the Conservatives to justify destroying this registry is that it would violate the freedom of firearms users by imposing red tape. That does not stand up. Only two million people have to deal with the registry's red tape out of a total population of almost 35 million Canadians. Why destroy this registry and sacrifice the majority of Canadians to save a very small minority from the administrative irritants of the registry? Should we stop registering vehicles? That is the argument. Yet there are far more users of vehicles than of firearms. Of course, vehicle registration does not go against the Conservative ideology.

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It is appalling that this irresponsible government is again trying to destroy the registry. Once again, this government is lying to Canadians to justify its position. Once again, this government is allowing U.S. interests, in this case the powerful gun lobbies, to dictate policy. It is time for this government to start listening to reason and the facts. Abolishing this registry will result in more suicides and more spousal homicides. Abolishing this registry will make police work harder and more dangerous.

This government is showing contempt for Canadians by imposing this ridiculous bill. The Conservatives always lower the bar simply because their position is dictated by regressive ideology.

I will continue to stand up for all Canadians abandoned by this government. I will fiercely oppose this irresponsible bill. I welcome any questions.

•(1305)

[*English*]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's intervention with interest. As he knows, some colleagues in the NDP have introduced a bill to actually fix some of the problems with the registry because it would be foolish to say that it is perfect. Everything can stand to improve.

I know my colleague will agree with me that the Conservatives are playing divisive politics with this bill. They are pitting urban against rural. They are pitting Canadians against one another and are refusing to compromise on anything.

Would the member be willing to consider amendments, or a different bill or ways in which we could actually improve the registry? Or is this just something that he and his party are blindly hoping to save at all costs?

•(1310)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, in my speech, I spoke about the Conservatives' ideology and how they cannot help themselves, but, once again, it is politics of division. In this case, we see men versus women. It is a clear case of where the government wants to create divisions between men and women. It did it with the poor against the rich, the middle-class and the lower-class, the religious and non-religious and urban and rural. It is a continuous process.

Hopefully the bill will not pass second reading but, if it does, I hope that in committee we will be able to put forward some amendments and that the Conservative government will be willing to acknowledge that some bills need to be amended and that it will work with members from both the NDP and Liberal Parties to make this a proper bill. If it does not want to listen to members of Parliament, it can always listen to members from some of the provincial legislatures, like the National Assembly of Quebec that just passed a motion yesterday saying that it supports the gun registry.

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech earlier, when I make a commitment to my constituents, as do my colleagues on this side of the House, we keep it. We said that we would abolish the long gun registry and we are doing exactly that.

What are the member's colleagues for Malpeque, Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor and Avalon going to say to their constituents about their flip-flop on the long gun registry? They said before that they would scrap it and now they are not. What do they plan to say to their constituents?

We have made a commitment to our constituents. We are scrapping the long gun registry and keeping our commitment. What are they saying to their constituents?

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, that is exactly what I was saying. We should forget about the divisive part because it is understandable. That will happen in every question they ask. The fact is that some of the members in my party have decided that is the way to go. It took a while but we are finally convinced. If we look at the last two votes on the gun registry, every member of Parliament in the Liberal Party supported the maintenance of the gun registry. It is very simple.

There are members in the Conservative Party who want to abolish it but they are so scared of the Prime Minister that they will not do it. The Liberal Party is known for having an open policy. The Conservatives should wake up and allow everybody a free vote and then we would see if we could get a proper bill out of the chamber.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this bill is actually quite consistent with the policies of the government, which is generally an evidence-free government. It does not seem to matter how many times it is told that minimum mandatories do not work, it still pursues it.

I was listening to one of the Conservative members who said that it was actually better that there be no gun registry because when police officers approach a situation, they always approach as if there are firearms. In this particular case, they are actually downloading their evidence-free philosophy on the police, implying that they would rather not know that there is something in the registry when they approach the house. Does that make any sense whatsoever?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: That is how you make mistakes.

Hon. John McKay: Evidence-free government.

•(1315)

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: Mr. Speaker, it was such a great question that he is still asking it.

The member is a hard-working member. I know he has been here for a while and knows all the issues. Maybe I could simplify it. The only similarity I can think of is when someone goes home and is hungry. The person is not sure what is in the fridge but he or she knows there will be some food there. There may be some things missing but at least we know that when we get home there will be some food in the fridge. It is the same thing. Police officers who know there is a gun in a house will be prepared differently than if they know there are no guns. Members can speak to any police officers. There are different ways to prepare for an operation.

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Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand in my place and contribute to the debate on Bill C-19, An Act to amend the Criminal Code and the Firearms Act, also known as the ending the long-gun registry act.

Several members on this side of the House have opened their interventions by talking about their personal history with respect to firearms, and I think I ought to do the same.

I do not own any firearms. I can count on one hand the number of times I have used a firearm, and I can state for the record that I do not even really like firearms. For me, this is not an issue about firearms. This is an issue about liberty. It is about individual liberty and it is an issue concerning the role of the state and, I would suggest, the tendency over the last two or three decades of the state encroaching upon the rights of law-abiding citizens and the individual liberties of Canadians. That is the perspective and the lens on which I assess the merits and the values of the long gun registry that was set up in the mid-1990s by a previous government.

As a libertarian, I must concede that we compromise on our libertarian values every day of the week. For example, when I arrived here on Parliament Hill this morning in a motor vehicle, we need to respect certain rules of the road. We can only drive on the right-hand side. We must observe speed limits and traffic control devices, both for our own individual safety and, obviously, for the safety of other pedestrians and other operators of vehicles. I accept that.

For any law, regulation, registration or registry to be valid and legitimate, it must pass three tests and those tests are the following: first, it must serve a valid purpose; second, it must be effective in achieving that purpose; and third, it must do so in a cost-effective manner. I would submit to members of the House that the long gun registry fails on at least two out of those three tests.

Is there a valid purpose? I suspect there actually is. The long gun registry was implemented in response to a very tragic event at École Polytechnique in Montreal. It was a tragic incident, one of the black marks in Canadian history, and there was considerable political pressure to do something to protect women and citizens generally against the violence of firearms.

I think the response of the government of the day was legitimate. I do not actually share the view of some of the members on this side of the House that the purpose of the bill was to criminalize hunters and farmers. I do not think that was the purpose. That is what happened, but I do not think that was the purpose. I will give the former government the benefit of the doubt that it actually was a legitimate purpose, although not well thought out.

The second test concerns whether the registry or the legislation was effective in achieving its purpose? I say, unequivocally, that it was not and it was not from the beginning because it was not thought out properly.

Members of the House, such as the member for Prince George—Peace River, who has been here since the infancy of the long gun registry, predicted back then and maintains to this day that we cannot effectively control violence with guns by targeting lawful, law-abiding gun owners.

That is consistent with any matter of policing. I live in the city of Edmonton where there has been over 40 murders this year and, incidentally, not one by a long gun. The weapon of choice most frequently used for murder in Edmonton is a knife, but that is a story for another day.

The police use their resources to police neighbourhoods and parts of Edmonton where they know crime occurs with greater prevalence and where criminals elements are known to exist. They do not routinely and frequently patrol the neighbourhoods where law-abiding citizens are known to exist.

When the authors of the registry decided that they would force legitimate gun owners, such as sportsmen, hunters and trappers, to register their weapons, they went after the wrong people. As was predicted and what should have been known and which was argued, if we check the *Debates* on Bill C-68, it was known then as it is now that criminals simply do not register their weapons. The program was ill-conceived, ill-thought out and, in fact, has not been effective in reducing crime.

• (1320)

I serve on the public safety committee. I served on the public safety committee in the last Parliament when the private member's bill sponsored by the member for Portage—Lisgar was before our committee. I had the opportunity of examining evidence, in some detail, from the then-president of the Canadian Police Association, Mr. Charles Momy. Mr. Momy came to the committee to tell us that abolishing the long gun registry would be a huge mistake, that it was a critical tool in the arsenal of the police toolkit. However, when pushed on that issue, he admitted to me that the police could not and do not rely on the long gun registry.

I will tell the House why he admitted that. When police respond to an incident, they do a long gun registry search. If the registry shows that there are no registered weapons at the residence, we asked Mr. Momy if the police could safely assume there are no weapons? His answer was, "Of course not". They have to go in hoping for the best but being prepared for the worst. The police do not rely on it when it shows there are no weapons registered at that residence.

I asked him a second hypothetical question. What happens if the long gun registry search shows there are in fact two weapons at that residence and the police go in, find the two weapons and take them out of play, does that mean they now have a safe crime scene? Can the police assume there is not a third or fourth weapon? His answer was. "Of course not. You always have to assume that there are additional hazards, additional perils at that scene, notwithstanding that the registry said there were two weapons and two weapons were found".

We have two examples, one where there was a negative result from a registry search and one where there was a positive result, and in neither circumstance did the police actually rely on the data.

We know that the police do not and cannot rely on the long gun registry. We know that it does nothing to deter crime under the very simple premise that criminals do not register their weapons.

Government Orders

The third part of my test regarding whether there is an appropriate legislative or registration response to a problem is the cost-effectiveness. Members will recall that the original estimate for Bill C-68, the long gun registry, was \$2 million. Now, that does not sound like a large sum of money to promote a legitimate goal, as I identified, which was to reduce violence, to reduce violence against women and reduce gun violence generally.

As we know, \$2 million was a gross underestimate of the actual cost. Was the estimate out by a margin of 10 or a margin of 100? No. It was out by a margin of 1,000. This long gun registry has cost taxpayers \$2 billion. It has done nothing and can do nothing to deter crime or prevent guns from falling into the hands of criminals. Although chiefs of police like to say that they are in favour of the long gun registry, when pushed and asked if, in a world of finer resources, they would prefer more boots on the ground or a long gun registry, they always answer that they would prefer resources for something other than a long gun registry.

On that test, the long gun registry fails. It is not an effective response to a legitimate goal. It is not a cost-effective response to a legitimate goal.

I am proud to stand in this House and be part of a Conservative government that will actually put an end to what was a train wreck from the beginning. I think the liberty of law-abiding farmers, hunters, fishermen, trappers and others will be preserved. I encourage all members to vote in favour of Bill C-19.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to my colleague at work in the justice committee and he is always very factual and to the point. I have heard many of his colleagues stand today and say over and over that they intend to keep their promise to abolish the registry.

What about the promise to actually do something about crime in our communities? What about the promise that the Conservatives made, I think it was in 2005 but I will stand corrected if I have the date wrong, when they pledged, as part of their platform, that they would put 1,000 RCMP on the ground and 2,500 municipal police officers on the ground? They had a whole campaign about boots on the ground. What about the promise to actually do that and actually make our communities safer?

This is not about keeping a promise, as we all know. This is about pure ideology. I would like to hear an answer from my colleague.

•(1325)

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, I always enjoy a good debate with the member for Halifax. She is always prepared and brings her A game.

With respect to the question, I will keep my promise, and I promise to abolish the wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

With respect to our other promise regarding whether we are going to do something to fight crime, perhaps the hon. member is familiar with Bill C-10 which is before the justice committee. It is a comprehensive bill that includes nine pieces of legislation from the former Parliament which we were not able to get through that minority Parliament. It deals with a variety of mandatory minimum sentences for individuals who grow drugs and sell them to children

and sell them near schoolyards. It deals with some sexual offences against children. It is a great bill, and I encourage her to support it.

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Edmonton—St. Albert for his presentation. I even tweeted it because I had not heard anyone in the House of Commons say “as a libertarian” at the beginning of a statement. I found that to be riveting.

I am baffled in this debate. Whenever a member of the opposition says that the police chiefs of Canada voted unanimously that they find the long gun registry useful, and whenever anyone in the opposition says that the RCMP commissioner, William Elliott, sent a report to the government on August 27, 2010 in which he said that the firearms registry is a critical component of the RCMP's entire firearms program and further, that it was cost effective and efficient, the response from the government tends to be that the opposition made these things up, that they did not happen. These reports stand.

I ask the hon. member to explain how it is that the institution of the RCMP and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police have supported the registry, yet the government members say it is not useful for them.

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity to question Chief Blair on this very issue when he appeared before the public safety committee on its examination of Bill C-391, a private member's bill in the last Parliament. I have no doubt Chief Blair supports the long gun registry and has his reasons for doing so, but I would submit to the hon. member that he does not speak for all the chiefs of police across Canada. He does speak for the association because he is the president.

The hon. member will do doubt know, or should know, that quite a number of chiefs broke ranks, although there was considerable political pressure not to break ranks. For example, Chief Rick Hanson from Calgary came to the committee. He did not share Chief Blair's advocacy for the long gun registry. I think if we asked police chiefs generally, in a world of finite resources where they have to choose between more boots on the ground or an ineffective long gun registry, they would answer that they want resources diverted elsewhere. If we asked them straight out about the long gun registry, they would probably give us a positive response, but if we asked them to rank it vis-à-vis other more effective resources, we would get a very different response.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I mentioned earlier that I was in the public accounts meeting when the Auditor General talked about the flawed nature of the data. There is a perception that an officer inquires on the long gun registry every time, but it is actually a computer program and there are a number of checks when a CPIC check is done. What data can be relied on? Does the member know about licensing and that data which is available all the time?

Private Members' Business

Mr. Brent Rathgeber: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has raised a good point. Yes, the registration information is inherently unreliable. It is searched thousands of times a day simply through a CPIC search when a motor vehicle is pulled over on a routine stop.

The licensing information is much more accurate. Nothing in this bill changes the licensing regime. Individuals who want to purchase firearms or ammunition will still need a licence. That information is much more accurate and much more effective in the hands of law enforcement.

• (1330)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): It being 1:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

FEDERAL FRAMEWORK FOR SUICIDE PREVENTION ACT

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC) moved that Bill C-300, An Act respecting a Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise today to begin our discussion regarding Bill C-300, an act respecting a federal framework for suicide prevention.

I want to thank the member for Toronto Centre for dedicating an opposition day to this important issue, and the member for Halifax for raising this issue in two consecutive Parliaments. I thank them for ensuring that this very political issue did not become partisan.

In that spirit, I use the word “discussion” rather than “debate” because I am convinced that the House is eager to take action on the national tragedy that suicide represents.

I also want to acknowledge the important contribution of the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention, its executive director, Mr. Tim Wall, and president, Dammy Albach, and Dr. Adrian Hill.

I also wish to extend a special thanks to Mr. Rory Butler of Your Life Counts, as well as Tana Nash and the Waterloo Region Suicide Prevention Council, and Dr. Antoon Leenaars, psychologist and suicide researcher.

Each of these individuals and groups has contributed to my work and I thank them for their efforts in suicide prevention.

I also want to acknowledge the 20 members who have added their formal support for Bill C-300 by attaching their names as seconders of the bill. Members of all parties in the House have voiced their support formally and informally and I am grateful as it signals that long awaited action is imminent.

I believe that all members will want the bill to move quickly on to committee for further study where any possible improvements can be incorporated into Bill C-300 before it is returned to the House for final approval. The sooner the bill receives royal assent, the better for all Canadians.

This will be the first small but very crucial step in providing additional hope for those who have worked in the trenches doing this noble work for years and years, often with far too little coordination, too few resources, and a lack of federal leadership and vision.

For far too long there has been a call for some strategic national leadership and unifying coordination of the great efforts of many community groups all across Canada, suicide prevention groups that have been key in identifying and addressing the risk factors relating to suicide. They have also worked within communities, schools, commercial companies and families to provide support and care for those left to deal with the burden of grief.

Bill C-300 establishes the requirement for the Government of Canada to develop a federal framework for suicide prevention in consultation with the relevant non-governmental organizations, the relevant entity in each province and territory, as well as the relevant federal departments.

In Canada, far too many lives, almost 4,000, are lost each year to suicide. Over 10 Canadian lives are ended each day prematurely and tragically, leaving behind broken communities and shattered family dreams. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among Canadian youth 10 to 24 years of age. In my home area of Waterloo region, three youths lost their lives to suicide in just one single week last year. Suicide has a horrific impact: shortened lives, shattered dreams, grieving families, devastated friends, and broken communities.

We need to do more to protect the sacred gift of human life, and I believe that all human life is sacred. I will stand for the protection and preservation of the dignity of all human life well after others may have decided that a specific life is no longer worth the extra effort, the extra care, or the extra protection in late senior years. My convictions and beliefs as they relate to this issue of life without a doubt have been shaped by my life's journey.

I was elected to Parliament in January 2006. I have the honour of representing the great people of Kitchener—Conestoga. Throughout these past five years plus, I have had the honour of meeting some incredible people from all sides of the House, many of whom have become very close friends.

One of the most welcoming and encouraging MPs I met in those early days would often take the time to say “great job” or “this 2006 class of MPs is exceptional”, or “hey, I know where you could find this, or here is someone who could help you with that”. Dave Batters was positive, he was an encourager, and he was fun to be around.

Our Prime Minister spoke at Dave's memorial service about his many contributions:

Private Members' Business

Dave held a place in all our hearts. To his wife and family, he was a loving and beloved husband, son and brother. To his friends, he was unfailingly loyal, generous and caring. And among his colleagues in Parliament, myself included, he was greatly admired for his dedication to his constituents, our party and our country.

• (1335)

In my experience, no one on either side of the aisle ever had a bad word to say about Dave.

His passion for the causes he embraced was combined with respect for his opponents. Dave was always excited about whatever issue or initiative he was working on. His energy and enthusiasm were infectious. He had a good sense of humour. He lifted spirits and inspired others. In fact, I used to tell my staff that I wished I could match Dave Batters' liveliness and optimism.

Members can imagine my shock and disbelief, and the shock of my colleagues, when we heard the tragic news that Dave Batters, MP, had lost his life to suicide. How could it be that someone so full of life could lose hope when he seemed to be enjoying life so much, including his role as member of Parliament? What brought about that deep sense of despair?

These are bigger questions than I am prepared to answer. Suicide and its causes are extremely complex and the solutions are also not simple. However, these big questions bring me back to another question. Why did I run for public office in the first place?

The reason I ran for public office, as I am sure every member in the House did, was to do my part to make this great country of Canada an even better country for my children and for my grandchildren. My family, my community, my life experiences here in Canada and internationally have all shaped my world view.

My faith journey as a Christian informs me that as humans we have the imprint of our creator deeply imbedded within each and every one of us regardless of social status, educational achievements, ethnic background, gender, colour of skin, so-called disability issues, or age. The list of the glorious variety placed within the human race goes on and on, but we are brothers and sisters.

As it relates to the tragic premature loss of life, what steps can we take to restore hope to those who are in despair? What can we do to improve the support mechanisms for those who are dealing with acute and chronic mental health challenges, or for those who have simply lost hope? What leadership can Parliament or the Government of Canada provide?

I am certain that everyone in this chamber can tell us how they, their family, or a member in their community has been negatively impacted by suicide. Each of us knows someone whose sense of hope was overcome by despair and ended his or her life by suicide. We understand that suicide does not end the pain; it simply transfers it to the family, friends and community.

There is no way to calculate the loss to families, our communities and our country. It is estimated that for every suicide there are 22 emergency department visits and 5 hospitalizations for suicide-related behaviour. It is a huge economic cost that must be considered.

More important than the economic costs, we must think of the thousands of families robbed of loved ones long before their time. These losses deprive our communities and our country of the important contributions that those lives, which were ended

prematurely, could have made. Four thousand times a year we suffer a tragic loss of human potential.

Suicide is a triumph of fear and the loss of hope. Suicide is most often the result of pain, hopelessness and despair. It is almost always preventable through caring, compassion, commitment and community.

In the first paragraph of the preamble to Bill C-300, members will find the following words:

Whereas suicide is a complex problem involving biological, psychological, social and spiritual factors, and can be influenced by societal attitudes and conditions;

It is widely recognized that in many cases, there may be biological, psychological, or physiological factors related to chemical balances and imbalances which lead to mood disorders.

The Canadian Mental Health Association of Ontario states:

People with mood disorders are at a particularly high risk of suicide. Studies indicate that more than 90 percent of suicide victims have a diagnosable psychiatric illness, and suicide is the most common cause of death for people with schizophrenia.

Social factors also may be a contributor to higher suicide rates. As we know, the suicide rate among aboriginal youth is five to seven times higher than among non-aboriginal youth. Along with the biological, psychological and spiritual factors, there are some key social factors that are having an impact on these high suicide rates.

The national aboriginal youth suicide prevention strategy was launched by Health Canada in 2005. It is a five-year strategy developed in full partnership with the Assembly of First Nations and Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, with an investment of \$65 million to establish community-based, culturally appropriate levels of prevention. Specific focus was placed on promotion of life and well-being. Budget 2010 added \$75 million to expand this program up to 2015.

• (1340)

Evidence is accumulating that when aboriginal communities, including Inuit communities, design their own interventions, typically, based on traditional cultural values and practices, the efficacy of these interventions is high. Therefore, there is hope, but much more needs to be done. We need to offer hope to those who are facing this unbearable pain and who subsequently descend into a state of hopelessness and despair.

I have touched briefly on the possible biological, psychological and cultural factors that may affect suicidal behaviour, but there is another key factor that far too often is ignored.

Professor Margaret Somerville of McGill University has said:

Hope is dependent on having a sense of connection to the future, even if that future is very short-term....Hope is the oxygen of the human spirit; without it our spirit dies.

Hope is a sense of connection to the future. Hope is the emotional state which promotes the belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life. Hope is a belief that life's events will turn out for the best.

Each of us can relate to the importance of having hope in our lives. That hope might be very short term, like getting through Grade 5, or graduating from high school, or getting one's driver's licence for the first time or even the upcoming weekend trip.

Private Members' Business

For people of faith, a longer term hope, in fact an eternal hope, is ours because of our belief in the reality of the resurrection.

A colleague in the House recently used the phrase, “death shall have no dominion”, crediting it to Dylan Thomas. In fact, this phrase finds its origin in the *Scriptures*, in the *Book of Romans* 6:9, in the context of Christ’s victory over death, a victory offered to each of us.

I have a strong hope of seeing my grandchildren in a few hours, when I travel home for the weekend. Over the next number of years, I hope to see my grandchildren graduate from elementary school and secondary school. I hope to see my grandchildren get married and develop strong families. I hope to see each of them contribute to the building of a stronger and better Canada. My ultimate hope, however, is in the reality that I will again see by wife Betty, who left this earth almost six months ago.

These smaller and shorter hopes and the longer-term hope remind us of the many joys in life. However, for those struggling with life, and perhaps struggling with suicidal thoughts, these sources of hope have dimmed or perhaps been lost altogether.

How can each of us make a difference? How can we help?

The very fact that this discussion is happening in the House of Commons in Canada is a huge step forward. It is time to break the silence.

Too many Canadians are in the dark about this issue. A recent survey by Harris-Decima conducted on behalf of Your Life Counts found that 86% of Canadians did not know that suicide was the second leading cause of death among our youth. Over one-third thought it was a small problem or not a problem at all. Over 96% of respondents stated that in order to reduce suicide, the topic should be freely discussed, without fear or shame. An overwhelming 84% believed that government should invest in suicide prevention.

Suicide is obviously a mental health issue, but it is so much more than that. Suicide is a public health issue affecting all Canadians. All of us, including all levels of government, need to do our part to face this issue head on, to work with communities across Canada to do all that we can to relieve the mental, emotional and spiritual pain of those who are in despair and who are struggling with suicidal thoughts, so we can keep them alive and safe.

A national framework for suicide prevention will create the connections, promote the consistent use of best practices, offer hope and send a clear message that this issue matters and is important, that every life is important. By working together, we can, and we will, make a difference.

Already a lot of great work is being done in suicide prevention across the country, but with some federal vision, federal coordination and federal leadership, we can do better for vulnerable Canadians.

I ask all hon. members of the House to please support Bill C-300 in order to make that happen.

•(1345)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to be the first recognized in what I am sure will be a fairly long list of members of Parliament who wish to congratulate the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his leadership on this

issue and for bringing forward the bill. I am very proud and look forward to being able to vote for it. I commend the member.

Could the member set out further the really critical role for mental health strategies that are so severely lacking, particular for our youth?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, my colleague called and wanted to second the bill. Unfortunately we already had 20 seconds. I thank her sincerely for her strong support.

If we take time to read the preamble and a number of points that are within the bill, what we are asking for is simply some coordination, national leadership and sharing of best practices. In our communities we all have great community groups already doing excellent work, but, without exception, they are calling out for some national leadership and visions and for the resources to help them do their job even better.

If we can get some of the research that is already being done and that is going to be commissioned out of the classroom and into the hands of people who are doing the work in the trenches, that is a good thing.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I commend the hon. member for his initiatives on Bill C-300. I have to admit a certain fondness for that name and a fondness for the member as well. I and our party will be supporting the bill. Therefore, from that standpoint there is not really much of a discussion about the issues.

However, I wanted to get into his vision about what the bill, in his ideal version, would accomplish. The bill talks about designating the appropriate entity to establish best practices, do education and things of that nature. In the member’s ideal vision of how this bill would roll out over time, what would he actually see, both from an organizational standpoint and also from a best practices, best purposes standpoint?

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his support as well.

We were careful to craft the bill in a way that would not enter into jurisdictions not under the federal government and that would give latitude to whichever entity this would be referred. I assume that would be Health Canada, however, I do not want to presume that. Nor do I want to presume that Health Canada would necessarily set up an agency within itself to do this work.

However, we are giving it the freedom to do this. A lot of great work has already been done by Health Canada, and we need to acknowledge that, and we need to bring together these groups already doing the work within Health Canada. We have too many different groups within our government, and not just related to suicide prevention. However, too often the silos of information are not being shared. By sharing the information across jurisdictional lines and within Health Canada, we will have a better approach to moving forward.

Private Members' Business

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we heard in the news, and as the hon. member mentioned this in his speech, people from his riding and some people in Ottawa felt they were different and because of that they felt they were being discriminated against and bullied. Whether they were different by the place they went to worship or by the colour of their skin does not matter.

I know the member said in his speech that we all have a responsibility. Could the member comment on some of the things we might be able to do in a proactive or mentoring way, as leaders in our community, as members of Parliament or just as average citizens.

• (1350)

Mr. Harold Albrecht: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my speech, the very fact that this discussion is happening is a big piece of that. Each of us works with people, one on one, here in the House or in our previous employment. We need to have our eyes and ears open to know what is happening. However, too often there is a stigma, a silence, a secrecy surrounding suicide.

I could reference some people whom I have come into contact with, such as a friend who said that he knew his aunt died of suicide, but the adult children of that aunt were not talking. They do not know that she committed suicide. Anything we can do to have a greater degree of openness to discuss it would be a good thing.

On that note, I want to commend the widow of the late Dave Batters for her openness in discussing this issue frankly and clearly, and not only being willing to discuss it, but taking great initiative to promote suicide prevention initiatives across Canada.

Mr. Mathieu Ravignat (Pontiac, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is at times like these that we realize what an incredible responsibility we have as members of Parliament when we feel compelled to speak about an issue as important and as complex and difficult as suicide. It is also at times like these that we are most impelled to speak from the heart.

Despite centuries of knowledge on the problem of suicide and various attempts to address the issue, it remains a persistent phenomenon, one which we cannot seem to tackle effectively. Perhaps it is the depth of the question which escapes us and makes it difficult for us to find concrete solutions, for suicide, perhaps unlike any other problem, condemns our society and culture.

As Albert Camus once wrote following upon the atrocities of the second world war and the loss of faith in human nature this entailed:

[Translation]

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide.

[English]

Though I may disagree with his conclusions on the question of suicide, I agree with his sentiment. Having seen those close to me grapple with depression and social exclusion and having been good friends as a teenager with a person who attempted suicide several times, it is difficult for me to see suicide as anything but a failure of the very social fabric of our society.

We are social beings, after all, and the suicide of one is the failure of all, a collective failure to tolerate and to forgive, a failure to accept those who feel and are different and those who struggle under the

ravages of mental illness and the stigma associated with it, but above all, a collective failure to love.

It is hard not to come to the conclusion that over the centuries of awareness of this problem that we as elected officials have been afraid to look into this problem. Perhaps it is because it entails taking a very long and very difficult look at ourselves and our immense fear of death. However, as an elected politician, I am here to say, and add my voice, that we are the representatives of those contemplating suicide as much as we are the representatives of any other Canadians. We have the responsibility to speak out and act. Our shared humanity compels us to act whether it be in our families, social circles or ridings.

It is truly sad that evidence continues to point to the failures of our inability to act. The suicide rate for Canadians, as measured by the WHO, continues to hover around 15 per 100,000 people. Populations at an increased risk of suicide include aborigines, youth, the elderly, inmates in correctional facilities, people with mental illness and those who have previously attempted suicide.

[Translation]

In Canada, more than 100,000 Canadians have committed suicide over the past 20 years—10 suicides a day and more than 3,500 suicides a year. In Quebec, the most recent data from the Institut national de santé publique du Québec indicate that 1,103 people committed suicide in Quebec in 2008. Adults between the ages of 35 and 40 are most at risk. Even though it has improved over the past few years, the suicide rate in Quebec remains an ongoing problem at 13.8 out of every 100,000 people. That is higher than Greece, Italy and even the United States. Each day, three Quebecers commit suicide. In 2009, 1,068 people killed themselves, and that does not include those who attempted suicide. Suicide is the third leading cause of death in 25- to 49-year-olds.

The situation is even worse in the aboriginal community. The suicide rate is four to six times higher for aboriginal youth than for non-aboriginal youth. The suicide rate is more than 10 times higher among Inuit than in the rest of Canada. The suicide rate for young men between the ages of 15 and 24 is 28 times higher in Nunavut than in the rest of the country.

That is shameful, absolutely shameful. The need for action is the main reason that I wholeheartedly supported the motion regarding a national suicide prevention strategy. That is why I made this speech. I support my colleague's bill with great enthusiasm. And I congratulate the hon. member for choosing to act, and I offer my help in his effort to prevent suicide.

• (1355)

[English]

Though the light shineth in darkness and the darkness comprehended it not, it does not consume it. Darkness is but the absence of light, and as children of that light and of its hope, I must believe that we can always choose to move toward it.

Private Members' Business

[*Translation*]

I believe suicide can be prevented. We must do it together. As elected officials, it is our duty to help these people through prevention and treatment programs in all communities. Suicide prevention is everyone's business. We need to raise public awareness of this issue and encourage everyone to help, rather than judge, those who suffer. Many initiatives have been launched across the country in recent years, such as establishing national guidelines for suicide prevention among seniors and funding research into suicide among aboriginal people. Now we need to develop a national strategy in order to offer services across Canada.

Everywhere in Canada there are people like those of Tel-Aide Outaouais, the distress centre in my riding, who are dedicated to suicide prevention in public administrations and I would like to commend their excellent work. As we know, simply being able to talk to someone at the right time can make all the difference in the world. At the same time, however, it is appalling that these efforts are often under-funded, in addition to being inconsistent and disorganized. The federal government must take action.

For instance, it needs to officially recognize that suicide is a major public health concern and make it a public policy priority in Canada. It must fund, support and coordinate a range of effective initiatives to prevent suicide. It must systematically evaluate initiatives and gaps in services across Canada. It must promote dialogue, research and the sharing of knowledge and skills among governments and stakeholders. Lastly, it must monitor trends and develop national guidelines in order to improve practices and intervention.

In closing, like Stendhal, I hope that, in the future of our country, tears become the ultimate expression of a smile for everyone, and that love becomes the miracle of our civilization.

• (1400)

[*English*]

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again it is an honour to rise and talk about this subject. The last time I spoke about this subject was on October 4. I spoke not only about the statistics and the facts of suicide in this country but I also related a personal story, as did many members in this House over one of the more extraordinary days we have had here.

It became clear to me after that day, as I reflected on it and was literally inundated by telephone calls, emails and personal approaches, that this was a subject matter the Canadian public was ready to have their elected representatives talk about.

I want to commend my hon. colleague from Kitchener—Conestoga for keeping this conversation alive. I think he has made a really good initiative. I hope we do not get lost in the weeds. As an initiative, it is about as carefully a thought-out initiative as it can be at this stage. I hope that this bill will go forward and I hope that when it does go to committee, it will receive some thoughtful reflection.

I was approached, I do not know how many times, after that speech on October 4. Colleagues who I only know in a peripheral sort of way came up to me afterward. The pattern of the conversation

was, "I want to commend you for the courage you showed in speaking". Then they would get into their own personal stories.

Almost without exception the stories were heartbreaking, really heartbreaking. I asked one colleague what his story was, and he said he had lost his wife to suicide 20 years ago. Another colleague in the other place lost a son to suicide. I was standing in line at the local LCBO, paying for my wine purchase for the weekend, and a lady tapped me on the shoulder, told me she had heard my speech and went on to tell me her story.

These cameras and these speeches actually can have an impact. I think that the hon. member is appropriate in bringing this forward and trying to do some form of legislative response which will hopefully move the ball forward.

Other colleagues have talked about the impact on individual populations, whether it is the gay youth or aborigines or young people. Each story is very discouraging. How to reach into that darkness of those who have suicidal ideation is really quite a challenge. I do not know what the answer to that challenge will be, but with this initiative there is some possibility that we may be able to reach those who attempt suicide, and apparently there are 100 attempts for every "successful" suicide. Perhaps by some means we can enter into the mind of the person who is contemplating that.

I was extremely touched by a pastor friend of mine who talked about the 13 suicides he has officiated at, two of which he literally cut down the body and some he had been counselling up to somewhere in the order of three hours prior to the death of the individual.

There is not a person in this room, and I dare say there is not a person who is watching this debate, who has not, in some manner or another, been affected by suicide.

• (1405)

I think we actually have moved forward. I was raised in a generation where if uncle so-and-so died in strange and mysterious circumstances, it would be described, particularly to the children, as something other than a suicide. We have moved off that point and made some progress.

It may be that the member for Kitchener—Conestoga will be part of moving us to that next stage where we de-stigmatize, which I think is good, and get beyond de-stigmatization to bring the rates of suicide down, not only for the general population but for discreet populations as well. Whatever we can do in that respect would be worthwhile for us as legislators.

We know our limitations and what we can do in the form of legislation and regulations, but it is certainly an improvement over doing nothing and I want to commend the hon. member for this initiative.

I did ask a question earlier with respect to his vision of how he sees this operating. I appreciated his answer, that he is not entirely sure how this will roll out in the form of legislation, as a government response to legislation. He shows a certain openness and I hope the government in turn shows a certain openness to his initiative.

Private Members' Business

From my side and my party, I would encourage the government to be very open with this piece of legislation. There would be a level of collaboration, which is not frequently seen here, and I hope the consequence of that collaboration could be the best possible legislative, regulatory, financial response that we could have to this plague, this blight on our society.

It is hugely ironic that we as a wealthy, well-developed, and well-educated populace have the third highest suicide rate in the industrial world. It does not seem to be quite right. Something is not good in this country. I commend the hon. member for his initiative and for pointing that out to us.

I do want to again thank the hon. member. He can count on me and our party for whatever support we can offer him as he goes through this legislative process.

Ms. Lois Brown (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-300, An Act respecting a Federal Framework for Suicide Prevention, put forward by the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga. I am also pleased to have the opportunity to provide some insight into the context surrounding suicide prevention and to highlight some of the efforts under way.

Suicide has devastating impacts on families and communities across the country. In Canada, suicide is the tenth leading cause of death overall. Approximately 3,600 Canadians commit suicide every year. Among Canadians aged 15 to 24, it is the second leading cause of death, and at-risk groups face disproportionately higher rates than the rest of the country.

Along with the enormous life-changing toll this takes on families and communities, it impacts every one of us directly or indirectly. For example, the economic cost of suicide and related behaviour in Canada is estimated at over \$2.4 billion per year. Recently several high-profile cases have brought significant media attention to this issue, including here in Ottawa.

Canadians know of the complexities of suicide and want to hear that we are acting collaboratively with communities, governments, health professionals, the private sector and many others. They want us to help ensure that resources are there, awareness is being raised and the information on prevention, treatment and coping is being shared. This is where we can make a difference, and these are the reasons I am pleased to speak to the bill put forward by the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga and thank him for his tireless work to bring the issue of suicide prevention out of the shadows.

As my colleagues will know, this bill seeks to establish a federal framework for suicide prevention. It calls for a framework to recognize that suicide, in addition to being a mental health issue, is a public health issue, and as such is a health and safety priority.

The framework would guide and strengthen coordination of existing Government of Canada suicide prevention efforts. It would promote collaboration and coherence, guide our engagement with many partners, including provinces and territories, and help inform potential future initiatives. It would also serve as a reporting tool for more systematic documentation and tracking of related current federal actions and investments. Further, federal work on each of the elements of the framework would help support multiple stakeholders

across Canada to optimize their efforts. The baseline information, best practices and research results generated would help ensure that the most effective interventions and services are provided to Canadians.

The bill recognizes that the prevention of suicide is complex and, like so many other health issues, cannot be addressed within the health portfolio alone. The bill provides a solid rationale for why we must harness the great work happening across the country. Many schools and communities across Canada are helping to raise awareness about the stigma of mental illness, initiating programs to prevent bullying and providing counselling and support for at-risk populations.

Provinces and territories are also carrying out programs to strengthen individual resilience and self-esteem and improve mental health. Nunavut's suicide prevention strategy, New Brunswick's Connecting to Life strategy and the 10-year plans established in Alberta and British Columbia are just a few examples. Countless others are providing new means of counselling, services, awareness raising and other activities for the workplace, schools, the community and individuals.

The Government of Canada is also a full partner and participant in suicide prevention. It invests in a number of programs designed to build positive mental health and address the underlying factors that can affect mental health and potentially lead to suicide.

• (1410)

For example, the government is very proud to provide funding of \$130 million over 10 years to establish and support the Mental Health Commission of Canada. The initiatives of the commission include the development of a mental health strategy for Canada, a knowledge exchange centre, and an anti-stigma campaign entitled Opening Minds.

Several federal departments and agencies also support and disseminate leading-edge research on mental health and suicide, including Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, among many others.

The Public Health Agency of Canada is investing \$27 million over the next four years to support nine large-scale mental health promotion initiatives in over 50 communities across Canada, and Budget 2010 provided \$75 million until 2015 to extend the national aboriginal suicide prevention strategy.

We can work together, and are working together, in a more collaborative way within government to ensure that our actions are guided as coherently and efficiently as possible. For this reason, the creation of a framework, which Bill C-300 proposes, is an important next step in this battle. It will report on progress being made and outline concrete measures that can improve the state of mental health.

Private Members' Business

After all, the federal family is complex and involves activities related to the health of many populations. For example, the RCMP and Canadian Forces are directly responsible for the health of their members, Health Canada is responsible for the promotion of health for first nations people living on reserve, as well as Inuit populations in the north, and Veterans Affairs provides services in support for veterans who have performed active service in a war.

By contrast, there are other departments whose actions provide guidance to Canadians as a whole. The Public Health Agency of Canada, for example, is responsible for providing public health guidance and coordinates health promotion and chronic disease prevention with complementary activities of individual provinces and territories.

Research on mental health and compilation of mental health statistics is conducted by a myriad of federal players, including the Canadian Institute for Health Information, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Public Health Agency of Canada and Statistics Canada.

Given a topic as big, broad and complex as the prevention of suicide, it would make sense for these departments and agencies to come together, share information and ensure their approach to this issue has the benefit of shared expertise, best practices and lessons learned.

It requires that the Government of Canada assume responsibility for six main activities: first, in providing guidelines to improve public awareness and knowledge about suicide; second, in disseminating information about suicide, including information concerning its prevention; third, in making existing statistics about suicide and related risk factors publicly available; fourth, in promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange across domains, sectors, regions and jurisdictions.

I want to elaborate on this point for a moment. We will be undertaking this activity in the very near term; I raise the point because it gets to the core of why we are all here, which is to ensure a collective and coordinated effort across Canada.

The fifth recommendation lies in defining best practices for the prevention of suicide. The final area is promoting the use of research and evidence-based practices for the prevention of suicide.

We are in agreement with the spirit of Bill C-300: that collectively, we can and must and will do more.

I want to again thank the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his dedication and passion in bringing the bill to the House.

We are committed to doing more. We encourage people to talk about suicide and mental health concerns with loved ones or with health professionals. We hope no one suffers in silence.

• (1415)

[Translation]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today in the House to support Bill C-300, regarding the creation of a federal framework for suicide prevention.

The NDP congratulates the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for introducing this bill. For years, the NDP has been calling on the

government to develop a national suicide prevention strategy. It is encouraging to see the Conservative government introduce a bill to address the serious issue of suicide at the national level.

The issue of suicide is particularly worrisome to me. I cannot forget the recent suicide of Jamie Hubley, a 16-year-old gay man who was the victim of harassment by his peers. As member of the NDP's lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender caucus, I was proud to hear our caucus's LGBT critic, the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, speak in the House of Commons on October 20, Spirit Day.

[English]

Spirit Day was started in 2010 by Canadian teenager Brittany McMillan to remember the LGBT and questioning youth lost to suicide. Spirit Day is also a time to rally governments and institutions nationwide to denounce homophobic bullying, which is a major contributor to these tragic losses.

[Translation]

In the Gaspé, this issue has many faces, and every year dozens of families and children are tragically left in mourning. These situations are even more tragic because they are often shrouded in silence and guilt.

[English]

In Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine the suicide rate per hundred thousand people is 25.2. This is far above the Quebec average, which is 15.

[Translation]

According to the *Portrait statistique des conduites suicidaires en Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine*, a report on suicide published in 2009 by the health and social services agency in Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine:

The Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine region has one of the highest suicide rates in Quebec. The region's suicide rate is 64% higher than the provincial rate.

According to statistics from 2003–2007, men in the region have a significantly higher suicide rate than other Quebecers.

According to the most recent data, the regional hospitalization rate for suicide attempts is significantly higher than the provincial rate.

Following the increase in suicide in the 1990s, the provincial rate has decreased since the start of the 2000s. However, studies on suicide trends in Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine paint a different [and very worrying] picture for the region, where the suicide rate continues to increase.

This increase in the regional suicide rate since the mid-1990s is mainly attributable to the increase in the number of male deaths. If we compare the five 5-year periods between 1983 and 2007, it is clear that the male suicide rate significantly increased during that period. For example, the suicide rate for males in the region increased from 25.4 per 100,000 in 1998–1992 to 38.1 per 100,000 in 2003–2007.

Private Members' Business

Suicide affects every part of society; however, there are some segments in which the suicide rate is quite a bit higher for social, economic and personal reasons. These segments must therefore be directly targeted by a national suicide prevention strategy. We are speaking about aboriginal people; youth, particularly young men; people with disabilities; abuse victims; seniors; people suffering from serious mental illness; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered people; and others.

• (1420)

[*English*]

While I applaud the member for Kitchener—Conestoga for bringing the bill forward and recognizing that suicide is a medical issue that needs to be dealt with nationally, it is also true that suicide is much more than a medical issue. It is a social and economic issue as well.

In fact, a recent study by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention concludes that suicide rates rise and fall with the economy. In tough economic times, suicide rates go up as people lose their jobs and often their homes.

According to the study published in the *American Journal of Public Health* in 2011:

The overall suicide rate generally rose in recessions like the Great Depression (1929-1933), the end of the New Deal (1937-1938), the Oil Crisis (1973-1975), and the Double-Dip Recession (1980-1982) and fell in expansions like the WWII period (1939-1945) and the longest expansion period (1991-2001) in which the economy experienced fast growth and low unemployment.

If we want to keep people from falling through the cracks, we need to ensure they have decent jobs and good government services.

My riding is made up of dozens of small towns and villages. Because there are no large cities in the region, residents do not have access to all the social and economic supports and services available to city dwellers. The government services we do have are crucial to our well-being.

Federal government services and programs like those offered by Service Canada centres and post offices are anchors for the communities in the Gaspé and the Islands. This is why the NDP is fighting to stop the Conservative government from closing down Service Canada centres in regions like mine.

At the New Richmond Service Canada centre, as many as 30 employees could lose their jobs delivering essential services to my constituents, services like employment insurance benefits. Citizens in my riding rely on EI payments to keep food on the table when they are out of work.

The Service Canada centre in New Richmond also provides access to training programs for aboriginal people, labour market information, disability benefits, pensions, old age security and job search tools. All these services help keep people from falling through the cracks. They help keep communities intact by making it easier for people to stay in their regions instead of being forced to move to a big city to find work and obtain government services.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Suicide is a problem for the communities in my riding, but in fact it is a national problem. People in distress need support in their community and appropriate public health resources. The suicide rate in Canada is one of the highest in the industrialized world. In Canada, 10 suicides are committed a day, or more than 3,500 suicides a year. More than 100,000 Canadians have committed suicide over the past 20 years. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among people aged 25 to 49 and the second leading cause of death among those aged 10 to 24.

In Canada, the number of people affected by suicide is roughly 3 million. No sector of Canadian society is spared from suicide and everyone suffers from the stigma attached to suicide, depression, addiction and mental illness. Suicide is symptomatic of a community that is not doing well, that is facing challenges. That is why Canadian society as a whole has to work on finding solutions to deal with this scourge.

[*English*]

It is this need to act on a national level that makes Bill C-300 so important. It is a first step in ensuring that Canada has a national strategy for addressing suicide.

The bill calls on the Government of Canada to establish a federal framework for suicide prevention that recognizes suicide, in addition to being a mental health issue, is a public health issue and that, as such, it is a health and safety priority.

The bill would ensure that suicide prevention is a national priority and would allow experts to work toward reducing Canada's suicide rate. Given time and the political will, we can move our communities to a place where the factors that can lead to or cause suicide are significantly improved upon.

I call on the Conservative government to pass the bill, but I also call on the Conservative members to consider that suicide is more than a mental health problem. It is just as much a problem caused by the weakening of our society and our economy. It is the Conservative government's responsibility to invest in Canada's economy and to maintain and improve the essential programs and services that all Canadians rely on.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton, I will have to tell her that I will need to interrupt her speech partway through when we get to the half hour mark, but we will begin.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, suicide, mental illness and depression have been the topics of several thoughtful and compassionate discussions of late in the House of Commons and it is an honour for me to participate in this critical discussion today on Bill C-300.

Private Members' Business

I congratulate the hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga for his leadership on this critical issue. I thank him for his leading role on the parliamentary committee on palliative and compassionate care, where he has entertained submissions from the Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention.

As we have heard today, suicide is a tragic issue which affects all Canadians. Sadly, as members of the House know all too well, aboriginal youth are affected by suicide more than any other group within our society. I will use my allotted time today to address issues within the aboriginal community.

Helping young aboriginal people, their families and communities as a whole is and must remain an issue of importance to Canadians. Our government has invested in many initiatives that play an important role in improving the quality of life for aboriginal people. We are building safer, healthier and stronger communities.

As a government we remain committed to working with all partners to help improve aboriginal health outcomes. As part of our commitment, budget 2010 allocated \$730 million over five years to renew aboriginal health programs. They focus on suicide prevention, diabetes, maternal and child health, health service integration, and aboriginal health human resources.

That builds on investments made through Canada's economic action plan to help create and renovate health facilities in first

nations communities. By providing \$135 million in funding over two years we have successfully completed 40 major health infrastructure projects and 135 renovation projects on existing infrastructure.

My time for debate is coming to end so I will close there. There are many more initiatives the government is undertaking to help aboriginal youth and aboriginal communities. We will continue to work with our partners to invest in first nations and Inuit suicide prevention programs in order to support communities, families and individuals in tackling this complex and wide-reaching issue.

• (1430)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton will have seven minutes remaining for her remarks when the House next takes up debate on this piece of legislation.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

[Translation]

It being 2:30 p.m., the House stands adjourned until next Monday at 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 2:30 p.m.)

APPENDIX

**ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS WITH THEIR
CONSTITUENCIES, PROVINCE OF CONSTITUENCY
AND POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS;
COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE,
THE MINISTRY AND PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY**

CHAIR OCCUPANTS

The Speaker

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

The Deputy Speaker and Chair of Committees of the Whole

MS. DENISE SAVOIE

The Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BARRY DEVOLIN

The Assistant Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole

MR. BRUCE STANTON

BOARD OF INTERNAL ECONOMY

HON. ANDREW SCHEER

MS. CHRIS CHARLTON

MR. JOE COMARTIN

MS. JUDY FOOTE

HON. ROB MERRIFIELD

HON. GORDON O'CONNOR

HON. PETER VAN LOAN

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs).....	Calgary—Nose Hill.....	Alberta	CPC
Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.....	Mississauga—Brampton South	Ontario	CPC
Adler, Mark.....	York Centre	Ontario	CPC
Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	Nunavut	CPC
Albas, Dan.....	Okanagan—Coquihalla	British Columbia	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	Ontario	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	Ontario	CPC
Allen, Malcolm.....	Welland	Ontario	NDP
Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook	Ontario	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	Ontario	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women.....	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	Alberta	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	Alberta	CPC
Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	Saskatchewan	CPC
Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Newfoundland and Labrador.....	Lib.
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	Ontario	NDP
Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley	Nova Scotia	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway.....	Fredericton	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Ashton, Niki	Churchill.....	Manitoba	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	Ontario	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	British Columbia	NDP
Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	Québec	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré—Mercier	Québec	NDP
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean.....	Ontario	CPC
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	Manitoba	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Ontario	Lib.
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	Québec	BQ
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's.....	Ontario	Lib.
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	Alberta	CPC
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	Québec	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	Québec	CPC
Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	Northwest Territories	NDP
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake.....	Manitoba	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	Québec	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	Québec	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	Québec	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	Saskatchewan	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	Québec	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	Québec	NDP
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	Saskatchewan	CPC
Boularice, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	Québec	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	Québec	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	Québec	NDP
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	Ontario	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	Saskatchewan	CPC
Brison, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	Québec	NDP
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	Ontario	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	Ontario	CPC
Bruinooge, Rod	Winnipeg South	Manitoba	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	Ontario	CPC
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Calandra, Paul , Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	Ontario	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	Alberta	CPC
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	British Columbia	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	Ontario	CPC
Caron, Guy	Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques	Québec	NDP
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Prince Edward Island....	Lib.
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	Ontario	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	Ontario	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant..	Québec	NDP
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	Nova Scotia	NDP
Chisu, Cornelius	Pickering—Scarborough East ..	Ontario	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	Ontario	CPC
Choquette, François	Drummond	Québec	NDP
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	Ontario	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	Ontario	NDP
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River	Saskatchewan	CPC
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	Ontario	CPC
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Québec	Lib.
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	Ontario	NDP
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	Québec	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Québec	Lib.
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	British Columbia	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	British Columbia	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	Ontario	CPC
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	British Columbia	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	British Columbia	NDP
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	Québec	NDP
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	Ontario	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	Ontario	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	Ontario	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	Ontario	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Québec	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	Québec	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	British Columbia	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	Québec	NDP
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	Alberta	CPC
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	Québec	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	British Columbia	CPC
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Ontario	Lib.
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	Alberta	NDP
Dusseault, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	Québec	NDP
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	Ontario	CPC
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Prince Edward Island	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	Ontario	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	British Columbia	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	British Columbia	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	Ontario	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	Ontario	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia	Manitoba	CPC
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia	Québec	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	Québec	NDP
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	British Columbia	Lib.
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	Ontario	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	Ontario	CPC
Garneau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Québec	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	British Columbia	NDP
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	Québec	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	Québec	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Gill, Parm.....	Brampton—Springdale	Ontario	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface.....	Manitoba	CPC
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	New Brunswick.....	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	New Brunswick.....	CPC
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	Alberta	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Saskatchewan	Lib.
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge.....	Ontario	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton.....	Ontario	CPC
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec ..	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière	Québec	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	Ontario	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	British Columbia	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	Québec	NDP
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister.....	Calgary Southwest	Alberta	CPC
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest.....	Ontario	NDP
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	Newfoundland and Labrador	NDP
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	British Columbia	CPC
Hassainia, Sana	Verchères—Les Patriotes	Québec	NDP
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Edmonton Centre	Alberta	CPC
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	Ontario	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale	British Columbia	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	Alberta	CPC
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	Saskatchewan	CPC
Hoeppner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	Manitoba	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	Ontario	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Ontario	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing	Ontario	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	Ontario	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Mississquoi	Québec	NDP
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	Ontario	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca ...	Alberta	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster ...	British Columbia	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission	British Columbia	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Ontario	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's ...	Nova Scotia	CPC
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	Ontario	NDP
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	Alberta	CPC
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill.....	Ontario	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	Saskatchewan	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	Ontario	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry ...	Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont.....	Alberta	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Manitoba	Lib.
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	Québec	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	Québec	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	Québec	NDP
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	Ontario	CPC
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	Québec	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	Québec	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	New Brunswick	Lib.
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	Québec	NDP
Leef, Ryan	Yukon	Yukon	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	Ontario	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	Ontario	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	Nova Scotia	NDP
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	Ontario	CPC
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	Québec	NDP
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	Ontario	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	Ontario	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	Saskatchewan	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	British Columbia	CPC
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Prince Edward Island....	Lib.
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	Nova Scotia	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	Ontario	CPC
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	Québec	NDP
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	Ontario	NDP
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	Manitoba	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	Ontario	NDP
Mathyssen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	Ontario	NDP
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	British Columbia	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	British Columbia	CPC
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Ontario	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	Ontario	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Ontario	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Ontario	Lib.
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo	British Columbia	CPC
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	Ontario	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	Alberta	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	Alberta	CPC
Michaud, Élaine	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	Québec	NDP
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	Ontario	CPC
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages.....	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	British Columbia	CPC
Moore, Hon. Rob	Fundy Royal	New Brunswick	CPC
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	Québec	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	Québec	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	Québec	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	Québec	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	Québec	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	Québec	NDP
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	British Columbia	Lib.
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	Québec	NDP
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	Ontario	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	Québec	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	Ontario	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	Ontario	CPC
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	Québec	NDP
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	Ontario	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	New Brunswick	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East	Alberta	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	Ontario	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	Ontario	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre	Ontario	CPC
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel	Québec	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable	Québec	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonquière—Alma	Québec	NDP
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat	Alberta	CPC
Péclet, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	Québec	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	Newfoundland and Labrador	CPC
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	Québec	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	Québec	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	Québec	BQ
Poilievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	Ontario	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London ...	Ontario	CPC
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	Québec	NDP
Rae, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Ontario	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	Ontario	NDP
Raitt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	Ontario	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	Alberta	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	Alberta	CPC
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	Québec	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Nova Scotia	Lib.
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	Ontario	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	Alberta	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	Alberta	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	Alberta	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	Ontario	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	Saskatchewan	CPC
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	Québec	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik —Eeyou	Québec	NDP
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	British Columbia	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	British Columbia	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	British Columbia	CPC
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Québec	Lib.
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	Saskatchewan	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	Ontario	CPC
Seebach, Kyle	Brampton West	Ontario	CPC
Sellah, Djaouda	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	Québec	NDP
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Ontario	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	Prince Edward Island....	CPC
Shipley, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	Ontario	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	Alberta	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Newfoundland and Labrador	Lib.
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	British Columbia	NDP
Sitsabaisesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	Ontario	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	Manitoba	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette	Manitoba	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	Alberta	CPC
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	Québec	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	Ontario	CPC
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	British Columbia	NDP
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	Nova Scotia	NDP
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	Alberta	CPC
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	British Columbia	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	Ontario	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	Ontario	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	Ontario	NDP
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	Ontario	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	Manitoba	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	Manitoba	CPC
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	Québec	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Province of Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord	Québec	NDP
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	Saskatchewan	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	Ontario	CPC
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Québec	Lib.
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	Ontario	CPC
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	Québec	NDP
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	Manitoba	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	Alberta	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	New Brunswick	CPC
Valeriote, Frank	Guelph	Ontario	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	Ontario	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	Ontario	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	Saskatchewan	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	Ontario	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	British Columbia	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	Alberta	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	Ontario	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	British Columbia	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	New Brunswick	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	British Columbia	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	New Brunswick	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	British Columbia	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	Ontario	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification)	Blackstrap	Saskatchewan	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	Ontario	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	British Columbia	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	British Columbia	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	Ontario	

ALPHABETICAL LIST OF MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS BY PROVINCE

First Session—Forty-first Parliament

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
ALBERTA (28)		
Ablonczy, Hon. Diane, Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs)	Calgary—Nose Hill	CPC
Ambrose, Hon. Rona, Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women	Edmonton—Spruce Grove	CPC
Anders, Rob	Calgary West	CPC
Benoit, Leon	Vegreville—Wainwright	CPC
Calkins, Blaine	Wetaskiwin	CPC
Dreeshen, Earl	Red Deer	CPC
Duncan, Linda	Edmonton—Strathcona	NDP
Goldring, Peter	Edmonton East	CPC
Harper, Right Hon. Stephen, Prime Minister	Calgary Southwest	CPC
Hawn, Hon. Laurie	Edmonton Centre	CPC
Hillyer, Jim	Lethbridge	CPC
Jean, Brian	Fort McMurray—Athabasca	CPC
Kenney, Hon. Jason, Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism	Calgary Southeast	CPC
Lake, Mike, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry	Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont	CPC
Menzies, Hon. Ted, Minister of State (Finance)	Macleod	CPC
Merrifield, Hon. Rob	Yellowhead	CPC
Obhrai, Deepak, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Calgary East	CPC
Payne, LaVar	Medicine Hat	CPC
Rajotte, James	Edmonton—Leduc	CPC
Rathgeber, Brent	Edmonton—St. Albert	CPC
Rempel, Michelle, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment	Calgary Centre-North	CPC
Richards, Blake	Wild Rose	CPC
Richardson, Lee	Calgary Centre	CPC
Shory, Devinder	Calgary Northeast	CPC
Sorenson, Kevin	Crowfoot	CPC
Storseth, Brian	Westlock—St. Paul	CPC
Uppal, Hon. Tim, Minister of State (Democratic Reform)	Edmonton—Sherwood Park	CPC
Warkentin, Chris	Peace River	CPC
BRITISH COLUMBIA (36)		
Albas, Dan	Okanagan—Coquihalla	CPC
Atamanenko, Alex	British Columbia Southern Interior	NDP
Cannan, Ron	Kelowna—Lake Country	CPC
Crowder, Jean	Nanaimo—Cowichan	NDP
Cullen, Nathan	Skeena—Bulkley Valley	NDP
Davies, Don	Vancouver Kingsway	NDP
Davies, Libby	Vancouver East	NDP
Donnelly, Fin	New Westminster—Coquitlam	NDP
Duncan, Hon. John, Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development	Vancouver Island North	CPC
Fast, Hon. Ed, Minister of International Trade and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Abbotsford	CPC
Findlay, Kerry-Lynne D., Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Delta—Richmond East	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Fry, Hon. Hedy	Vancouver Centre	Lib.
Garrison, Randall	Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca	NDP
Grewal, Nina	Fleetwood—Port Kells	CPC
Harris, Richard	Cariboo—Prince George	CPC
Hiebert, Russ	South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale	CPC
Julian, Peter	Burnaby—New Westminster	NDP
Kamp, Randy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway	Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission ..	CPC
Lunney, James	Nanaimo—Alberni	CPC
May, Elizabeth	Saanich—Gulf Islands	GP
Mayes, Colin	Okanagan—Shuswap	CPC
McLeod, Cathy, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue	Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo	CPC
Moore, Hon. James, Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages	Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam	CPC
Murray, Joyce	Vancouver Quadra	Lib.
Sandhu, Jasbir	Surrey North	NDP
Savoie, Denise, The Deputy Speaker	Victoria	NDP
Saxton, Andrew, Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board and for Western Economic Diversification	North Vancouver	CPC
Sims, Jinny Jogindera	Newton—North Delta	NDP
Stewart, Kennedy	Burnaby—Douglas	NDP
Strahl, Mark	Chilliwack—Fraser Canyon	CPC
Warawa, Mark	Langley	CPC
Weston, John	West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country	CPC
Wilks, David	Kootenay—Columbia	CPC
Wong, Hon. Alice, Minister of State (Seniors)	Richmond	CPC
Young, Wai	Vancouver South	CPC
Zimmer, Bob	Prince George—Peace River	CPC

MANITOBA (14)

Ashton, Niki	Churchill	NDP
Bateman, Joyce	Winnipeg South Centre	CPC
Bezan, James	Selkirk—Interlake	CPC
Bruinooge, Rod	Winnipeg South	CPC
Fletcher, Hon. Steven, Minister of State (Transport)	Charleswood—St. James—Assiniboia	CPC
Glover, Shelly, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance	Saint Boniface	CPC
Hoepner, Candice, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Safety	Portage—Lisgar	CPC
Lamoureux, Kevin	Winnipeg North	Lib.
Martin, Pat	Winnipeg Centre	NDP
Smith, Joy	Kildonan—St. Paul	CPC
Sopuck, Robert	Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette	CPC
Toet, Lawrence	Elmwood—Transcona	CPC
Toews, Hon. Vic, Minister of Public Safety	Provencher	CPC
Tweed, Merv	Brandon—Souris	CPC

NEW BRUNSWICK (10)

Allen, Mike	Tobique—Mactaquac	CPC
Ashfield, Hon. Keith, Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and Minister for the Atlantic Gateway	Fredericton	CPC

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Godin, Yvon	Acadie—Bathurst	NDP
Goguen, Robert, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice	Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe	CPC
LeBlanc, Hon. Dominic	Beauséjour	Lib.
Moore, Hon. Rob	Fundy Royal	CPC
O'Neill Gordon, Tilly	Miramichi	CPC
Valcourt, Hon. Bernard, Minister of State (Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency) (La Francophonie)	Madawaska—Restigouche	CPC
Weston, Rodney	Saint John	CPC
Williamson, John	New Brunswick Southwest	CPC

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR (7)

Andrews, Scott	Avalon	Lib.
Byrne, Hon. Gerry	Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte	Lib.
Cleary, Ryan	St. John's South—Mount Pearl	NDP
Foote, Judy	Random—Burin—St. George's	Lib.
Harris, Jack	St. John's East	NDP
Penashue, Hon. Peter, Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada	Labrador	CPC
Simms, Scott	Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor	Lib.

NORTHWEST TERRITORIES (1)

Bevington, Dennis	Western Arctic	NDP
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NOVA SCOTIA (11)

Armstrong, Scott	Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley	CPC
Brison, Hon. Scott	Kings—Hants	Lib.
Chisholm, Robert	Dartmouth—Cole Harbour	NDP
Cuzner, Rodger	Cape Breton—Canso	Lib.
Eyking, Hon. Mark	Sydney—Victoria	Lib.
Keddy, Gerald, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency and for the Atlantic Gateway	South Shore—St. Margaret's	CPC
Kerr, Greg	West Nova	CPC
Leslie, Megan	Halifax	NDP
MacKay, Hon. Peter, Minister of National Defence	Central Nova	CPC
Regan, Hon. Geoff	Halifax West	Lib.
Stoffer, Peter	Sackville—Eastern Shore	NDP

NUNAVUT (1)

Aglukkaq, Hon. Leona, Minister of Health and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency	Nunavut	CPC
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ONTARIO (105)

Adams, Eve, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs	Mississauga—Brampton South	CPC
Adler, Mark	York Centre	CPC
Albrecht, Harold	Kitchener—Conestoga	CPC
Alexander, Chris, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence	Ajax—Pickering	CPC
Allen, Malcolm	Welland	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Allison, Dean	Niagara West—Glanbrook	CPC
Ambler, Stella	Mississauga South	CPC
Angus, Charlie	Timmins—James Bay	NDP
Aspin, Jay	Nipissing—Timiskaming	CPC
Baird, Hon. John, Minister of Foreign Affairs	Ottawa West—Nepean	CPC
Bélanger, Hon. Mauril	Ottawa—Vanier	Lib.
Bennett, Hon. Carolyn	St. Paul's	Lib.
Braid, Peter	Kitchener—Waterloo	CPC
Brown, Gordon	Leeds—Grenville	CPC
Brown, Lois, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Cooperation	Newmarket—Aurora	CPC
Brown, Patrick	Barrie	CPC
Butt, Brad	Mississauga—Streetsville	CPC
Calandra, Paul , Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage	Oak Ridges—Markham	CPC
Carmichael, John	Don Valley West	CPC
Carrie, Colin, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health	Oshawa	CPC
Cash, Andrew	Davenport	NDP
Charlton, Chris	Hamilton Mountain	NDP
Chisu, Cornelius	Pickering—Scarborough East	CPC
Chong, Hon. Michael	Wellington—Halton Hills	CPC
Chow, Olivia	Trinity—Spadina	NDP
Christopherson, David	Hamilton Centre	NDP
Clement, Hon. Tony, President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Parry Sound—Muskoka	CPC
Comartin, Joe	Windsor—Tecumseh	NDP
Daniel, Joe	Don Valley East	CPC
Davidson, Patricia	Sarnia—Lambton	CPC
Dechert, Bob, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs	Mississauga—Erindale	CPC
Del Mastro, Dean, Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs	Peterborough	CPC
Devolin, Barry, The Acting Speaker	Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock	CPC
Dewar, Paul	Ottawa Centre	NDP
Duncan, Kirsty	Etobicoke North	Lib.
Dykstra, Rick, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration	St. Catharines	CPC
Fantino, Hon. Julian, Associate Minister of National Defence	Vaughan	CPC
Finley, Hon. Diane, Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development	Haldimand—Norfolk	CPC
Flaherty, Hon. Jim, Minister of Finance	Whitby—Oshawa	CPC
Galipeau, Royal	Ottawa—Orléans	CPC
Gallant, Cheryl	Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke	CPC
Gill, Parm	Brampton—Springdale	CPC
Goodyear, Hon. Gary, Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario)	Cambridge	CPC
Gosal, Hon. Bal, Minister of State (Sport)	Bramalea—Gore—Malton	CPC
Gravelle, Claude	Nickel Belt	NDP
Harris, Dan	Scarborough Southwest	NDP
Hayes, Bryan	Sault Ste. Marie	CPC
Holder, Ed	London West	CPC
Hsu, Ted	Kingston and the Islands	Lib.
Hughes, Carol	Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing	NDP
Hyer, Bruce	Thunder Bay—Superior North	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
James, Roxanne	Scarborough Centre	CPC
Karygiannis, Hon. Jim	Scarborough—Agincourt	Lib.
Kellway, Matthew	Beaches—East York	NDP
Kent, Hon. Peter, Minister of the Environment	Thornhill	CPC
Kramp, Daryl	Prince Edward—Hastings	CPC
Lauzon, Guy	Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry	CPC
Leitch, Kellie, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour	Simcoe—Grey	CPC
Lemieux, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture	Glengarry—Prescott—Russell	CPC
Leung, Chungsen, Parliamentary Secretary for Multiculturalism	Willowdale	CPC
Lizon, Wladyslaw	Mississauga East—Cooksville	CPC
Lobb, Ben	Huron—Bruce	CPC
MacKenzie, Dave	Oxford	CPC
Marston, Wayne	Hamilton East—Stoney Creek	NDP
Masse, Brian	Windsor West	NDP
Mathyssen, Irene	London—Fanshawe	NDP
McCallum, Hon. John	Markham—Unionville	Lib.
McColeman, Phil	Brant	CPC
McGuinty, David	Ottawa South	Lib.
McKay, Hon. John	Scarborough—Guildwood	Lib.
Menegakis, Costas	Richmond Hill	CPC
Miller, Larry	Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound	CPC
Nash, Peggy	Parkdale—High Park	NDP
Nicholson, Hon. Rob, Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada	Niagara Falls	CPC
Norlock, Rick	Northumberland—Quinte West	CPC
O'Connor, Hon. Gordon, Minister of State and Chief Government Whip	Carleton—Mississippi Mills	CPC
Oda, Hon. Bev, Minister of International Cooperation	Durham	CPC
Oliver, Hon. Joe, Minister of Natural Resources	Eglinton—Lawrence	CPC
Opitz, Ted	Etobicoke Centre	CPC
Poirievre, Pierre, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario	Nepean—Carleton	CPC
Preston, Joe	Elgin—Middlesex—London	CPC
Rae, Hon. Bob	Toronto Centre	Lib.
Rafferty, John	Thunder Bay—Rainy River	NDP
Raitt, Hon. Lisa, Minister of Labour	Halton	CPC
Reid, Scott	Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington	CPC
Rickford, Greg, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, for the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency and for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario	Kenora	CPC
Schellenberger, Gary	Perth—Wellington	CPC
Seeback, Kyle	Brampton West	CPC
Sgro, Hon. Judy	York West	Lib.
Shipley, Bev	Lambton—Kent—Middlesex	CPC
Sitsabaisesan, Rathika	Scarborough—Rouge River	NDP
Stanton, Bruce, The Acting Speaker	Simcoe North	CPC
Sullivan, Mike	York South—Weston	NDP
Sweet, David	Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale	CPC
Thibeault, Glenn	Sudbury	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Tilson, David	Dufferin—Caledon	CPC
Trottier, Bernard	Etobicoke—Lakeshore	CPC
Truppe, Susan, Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women	London North Centre	CPC
Valerio, Frank	Guelph	Lib.
Van Kesteren, Dave	Chatham-Kent—Essex	CPC
Van Loan, Hon. Peter, Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	York—Simcoe	CPC
Wallace, Mike	Burlington	CPC
Watson, Jeff	Essex	CPC
Woodworth, Stephen	Kitchener Centre	CPC
Young, Terence	Oakville	CPC
VACANCY	Toronto—Danforth	
PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND (4)		
Casey, Sean	Charlottetown	Lib.
Easter, Hon. Wayne	Malpeque	Lib.
MacAulay, Hon. Lawrence	Cardigan	Lib.
Shea, Hon. Gail, Minister of National Revenue	Egmont	CPC
QUÉBEC (75)		
Aubin, Robert	Trois-Rivières	NDP
Ayala, Paulina	Honoré-Mercier	NDP
Bellavance, André	Richmond—Arthabaska	BQ
Benskin, Tyrone	Jeanne-Le Ber	NDP
Bernier, Hon. Maxime, Minister of State (Small Business and Tourism)	Beauce	CPC
Blanchette, Denis	Louis-Hébert	NDP
Blanchette-Lamothe, Lysane	Pierrefonds—Dollard	NDP
Blaney, Hon. Steven, Minister of Veterans Affairs	Lévis—Bellechasse	CPC
Boivin, Françoise	Gatineau	NDP
Borg, Charmaine	Terrebonne—Blainville	NDP
Boularic, Alexandre	Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie	NDP
Boutin-Sweet, Marjolaine	Hochelaga	NDP
Brahmi, Tarik	Saint-Jean	NDP
Brosseau, Ruth Ellen	Berthier—Maskinongé	NDP
Caron, Guy	Rimouski—Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques	NDP
Chicoine, Sylvain	Châteauguay—Saint-Constant	NDP
Choquette, François	Drummond	NDP
Coderre, Hon. Denis	Bourassa	Lib.
Côté, Raymond	Beauport—Limoilou	NDP
Cotler, Hon. Irwin	Mount Royal	Lib.
Day, Anne-Marie	Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles	NDP
Dion, Hon. Stéphane, Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Saint-Laurent—Cartierville	Lib.
Dionne Labelle, Pierre	Rivière-du-Nord	NDP
Doré Lefebvre, Rosane	Alfred-Pellan	NDP
Dubé, Matthew	Chambly—Borduas	NDP
Dusseault, Pierre-Luc	Sherbrooke	NDP
Fortin, Jean-François	Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia	BQ
Freeman, Mylène	Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Garneau, Marc	Westmount—Ville-Marie	Lib.
Genest, Réjean	Shefford	NDP
Genest-Jourdain, Jonathan	Manicouagan	NDP
Giguère, Alain	Marc-Aurèle-Fortin	NDP
Gourde, Jacques, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec	Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière	CPC
Groguhé, Sadia	Saint-Lambert	NDP
Hassainia, Sana	Verchères—Les Patriotes	NDP
Jacob, Pierre	Brome—Missisquoi	NDP
Lapointe, François	Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup	NDP
Larose, Jean-François	Repentigny	NDP
Latendresse, Alexandrine	Louis-Saint-Laurent	NDP
Laverdière, Hélène	Laurier—Sainte-Marie	NDP
Lebel, Hon. Denis, Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and Minister of the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec	Roberval—Lac-Saint-Jean	CPC
LeBlanc, Hélène	LaSalle—Émard	NDP
Liu, Laurin	Rivière-des-Mille-Îles	NDP
Mai, Hoang	Brossard—La Prairie	NDP
Michaud, Élaine	Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier	NDP
Moore, Christine	Abitibi—Témiscamingue	NDP
Morin, Dany	Chicoutimi—Le Fjord	NDP
Morin, Isabelle	Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine	NDP
Morin, Marc-André	Laurentides—Labelle	NDP
Morin, Marie-Claude	Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot	NDP
Mourani, Maria	Ahuntsic	BQ
Mulcair, Thomas	Outremont	NDP
Nantel, Pierre	Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher	NDP
Nicholls, Jamie	Vaudreuil-Soulanges	NDP
Nunez-Melo, José	Laval	NDP
Pacetti, Massimo	Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel	Lib.
Papillon, Annick	Québec	NDP
Paradis, Hon. Christian, Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture)	Mégantic—L'Érable	CPC
Patry, Claude	Jonquière—Alma	NDP
Péclet, Ève	La Pointe-de-l'Île	NDP
Perreault, Manon	Montcalm	NDP
Pilon, François	Laval—Les Îles	NDP
Plamondon, Louis	Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour	BQ
Quach, Anne Minh-Thu	Beauharnois—Salaberry	NDP
Ravignat, Mathieu	Pontiac	NDP
Raynault, Francine	Joliette	NDP
Rousseau, Jean	Compton—Stanstead	NDP
Saganash, Romeo	Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou	NDP
Scarpaleggia, Francis	Lac-Saint-Louis	Lib.
Sellah, Djaouda	Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert	NDP
St-Denis, Lise	Saint-Maurice—Champlain	NDP
Toone, Philip	Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine	NDP
Tremblay, Jonathan	Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord	NDP

Name of Member	Constituency	Political Affiliation
Trudeau, Justin	Papineau	Lib.
Turmel, Nycole	Hull—Aylmer	NDP
SASKATCHEWAN (14)		
Anderson, David, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board	Cypress Hills—Grasslands	CPC
Block, Kelly	Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar	CPC
Boughen, Ray	Palliser	CPC
Breitkreuz, Garry	Yorkton—Melville	CPC
Clarke, Rob	Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River	CPC
Goodale, Hon. Ralph	Wascana	Lib.
Hoback, Randy	Prince Albert	CPC
Komarnicki, Ed	Souris—Moose Mountain	CPC
Lukiwski, Tom, Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons	Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre	CPC
Ritz, Hon. Gerry, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board	Battlefords—Lloydminster	CPC
Scheer, Hon. Andrew, Speaker of the House of Commons	Regina—Qu'Appelle	CPC
Trost, Brad	Saskatoon—Humboldt	CPC
Vellacott, Maurice	Saskatoon—Wanuskewin	CPC
Yelich, Hon. Lynne, Minister of State (Western Economic Diversification)	Blackstrap	CPC
YUKON (1)		
Leef, Ryan	Yukon	CPC

LIST OF STANDING AND SUB-COMMITTEES

(As of October 28, 2011 — 1st Session, 41st Parliament)

ACCESS TO INFORMATION, PRIVACY AND ETHICS

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Jean Crowder

Vice-Chairs:

Scott Andrews
Patricia Davidson

Charlie Angus
Ruth Ellen Brosseau
Brad Butt

Blaine Calkins
John Carmichael

Dean Del Mastro
Earl Dreessen

Pierre-Luc Dusseault
Colin Mayes

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Harold Albrecht
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Lois Brown
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Stephen Woodworth
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Wai Young
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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

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John Carmichael	Roxanne James	Scott Reid	Stephen Woodworth
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Michael Chong	Gerald Keddy	Lee Richardson	

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Vice-Chairs:

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Scott Simms

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Tyrone Benskin
Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet

Gordon Brown
Paul Calandra

Andrew Cash
Parm Gill

Jim Hillyer
Terence Young

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Randy Kamp
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Gerald Keddy
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Rodney Weston
David Wilks
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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

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Eve Adams	Olivia Chow	Ed Komarnicki	Andrew Saxton
Mark Adler	Rob Clarke	Daryl Kramp	Gary Schellenberger
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Chris Alexander	Bob Dechert	Ryan Leef	Devinder Shory
Mike Allen	Dean Del Mastro	Kellie Leitch	Joy Smith
Dean Allison	Earl Dreessen	Pierre Lemieux	Robert Sopuck
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Ray Boughen	Nina Grewal	Larry Miller	Merv Tweed
Peter Braid	Richard Harris	Rob Moore	Dave Van Kesteren
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Brad Butt	Candice Hoeppner	Joe Preston	Rodney Weston
Paul Calandra	Ed Holder	James Rajotte	David Wilks
Blaine Calkins	Brian Jean	Brent Rathgeber	John Williamson
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John Carmichael	Randy Kamp	Michelle Rempel	Terence Young
Colin Carrie	Jim Karygiannis	Blake Richards	Wai Young
Corneliu Chisu	Gerald Keddy	Lee Richardson	Bob Zimmer
Michael Chong	Greg Kerr	Greg Rickford	

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Mike Allen	Stéphane Dion	Kellie Leitch	Kyle Seebach
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David Anderson	Rick Dykstra	Wladyslaw Lizon	Jinny Jogindera Sims
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Gordon Brown	Laurie Hawn	Joyce Murray	Dave Van Kesteren
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Patrick Brown	Russ Hiebert	Tilly O'Neill Gordon	Mike Wallace
Rod Bruinooge	Jim Hillyer	Deepak Obhrai	Chris Warkentin
Brad Butt	Randy Hoback	Ted Opitz	Jeff Watson
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Blaine Calkins	Ed Holder	Pierre Poilievre	Rodney Weston
Ron Cannan	Roxanne James	Joe Preston	David Wilks
John Carmichael	Brian Jean	James Rajotte	John Williamson
Colin Carrie	Peter Julian	Brent Rathgeber	Terence Young
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Rob Clarke	Greg Kerr		

FINANCE

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Jay Aspin	Robert Goguen	Phil McColeman	David Sweet
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Kelly Block	Richard Harris	Rob Moore	Brad Trost
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Ron Cannan	Greg Kerr	Blake Richards	John Williamson
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David Anderson	Cheryl Gallant	Dave MacKenzie	Brian Storseth
Scott Armstrong	Parm Gill	Colin Mayes	Mark Strahl
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Associate Members

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HOUSE OF COMMONS
CHAMBRE DES COMMUNES
CANADA



House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 146 • NUMBER 040 • 1st SESSION • 41st PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Monday, October 31, 2011

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Monday, October 31, 2011

The House met at 11 a.m.

Prayers

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1105)

[*English*]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC) moved that Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, today, I am honoured to speak in support of my private member's bill, Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses), in order cosmetic or decorative contact lenses under the same medical device regulations as corrective contact lenses.

I thank the professionals within the eye care community who have contacted my office in recent weeks with their kind words of support for my private member's bill.

Each member in the House today has representatives of the eye care industry in their riding, and I hope members will heed their warnings about the dangers of the incorrect use of decorative contact lenses that we are hearing more about each day in news reports and medical studies.

Bill C-313 has gained the support of three eye care organizations representing various professionals from the eye care industry. The Canadian Association of Optometrists, the Opticians Association of Canada and the Canada Ophthalmological Society are important stakeholders in any discussion on eye care related to their profession.

Today, I intend to share medical evidence with hon. members that will show the clear need for the provision sought after by Bill C-313.

Before we discuss Bill C-313 further, I want to take members back to a different time and place, to the autumn of 2007 in the 39th Parliament of Canada. It was during that period that the concerns of eye care professionals from across Canada were first brought to my attention. At the time, I was an active member of the Standing Committee on Health.

There were many concerns that were brought forward to the parliamentarians on that committee, and while all the concerns were important, I was particularly seized by the concerns that were brought to me by the professional eye care organizations in relation to the lack of regulatory oversight on what were called non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses.

It is very easy to break down the main concern brought forward to me all those years ago. A cosmetic contact lens is identical to a corrective lens in terms of its impact on the human eyeball, with the only difference being that it does not correct a sight imbalance.

However, despite the fact that they are identical to a corrective lens, these cosmetic lenses were and, to this day, continue to be free of regulatory oversight similar to the provisions in place for corrective lenses.

It was with this simple fact in mind that I began work in 2007 to further understand the risks of cosmetic contact lenses. We must remember that cosmetic, decorative and plano contact lenses are all referring to the same product. I will use all three terms in my discussion today.

After extensive study, liaising with health researchers and eye care professionals, meeting with our own experts from Health Canada and engaging with the opposition health critics, I developed a strategy that would ensure that Canadians' eye health would be protected. The result was private member's Motion No. 409, which proposed that cosmetic lenses should be classified as medical devices and be regulated accordingly under the Food and Drugs Act.

The actual text of Motion No. 409 read as follows:

That, in the opinion of the House, the Minister of Health should regulate non-corrective, cosmetic contact lenses as medical devices under the Hazardous Product Act or the Food and Drugs Act.

The motion passed unanimously on March 7, 2008, in a fractured minority Parliament, no less, which I believe is a testament to the fact that this is not a political issue. Rather, we are discussing a human health issue that could impact many Canadians, especially our youth, which I will speak to shortly.

Due to the importance of the motion to Canadians' health, I was able to obtain the full support of all the opposition parties and their health critics, in addition to the support of the government and the Minister of Health. Today, I seek that same support from across the aisle.

Private Members' Business

I was pleased that the government acted upon the unanimously passed motion. It was in 2008 that the Government of Canada, upon advice from Health Canada, introduced my motion as an amendment to the omnibus Food and Drugs Act amendment in the former Bill C-51, which was introduced in April 2008, but which also died on the order paper upon the election in the fall of 2008.

It was unfortunate that having already had my private member's spot used in the 39th Parliament, I found myself near the bottom of the long private members' business list. This meant I would not have the ability to bring this legislative change forward for some time.

Moving ahead to late 2010, now in the 40th Parliament, it became evident that I would possibly have the ability to bring forward private members' business. Knowing that I had unfinished business, I reached out to the professional eye care organizations to begin discussions on the types of legislative remedies that could be brought forward.

• (1110)

My main concern was to ensure that my private member's bill would adequately and fully address the concerns held by myself, other parliamentarians and thousands of eye care professionals across Canada.

Of course, we have had another election since then and, upon being re-elected by the citizens of Sarnia—Lambton, I found myself returning to a new House of Commons in the 41st Parliament. I also found myself near the top of the list for private member's business, meaning that months of research and effort through my office were about to be realized in terms of finally bridging the regulatory gaps that exist for decorative non-corrective lenses.

The culmination of this long process now stands before the House of Commons for debate. With this brief background on my bill now before the House, I would like to discuss Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses), with everyone today.

I can sum up the situation regarding the need for my legislation in one sentence regarding non-corrective cosmetic lenses. National distribution of these products without professional oversight, fitting and training significantly increases the risk of public harm.

The difference between 2007, when I first brought my private member's motion forward, and 2011, is that I now have the peer reviewed medical evidence to back up my claim. Today, we now know that the warnings on cosmetic lenses dating back to October 23, 2000 by Health Canada are, in fact, quite well warranted and now demand a legislative recourse to alleviate the potential harm that could be done to consumers of these products.

To some, it may seem that to deem a decorative lens as a harmful product is somewhat overreaching, yet eye care professionals and medical researchers have shown otherwise. A short list of the complications that could occur due to unsafe handling and wearing an improperly fitted lens in one's eye, along with the lack of professional oversight when these products are initially obtained by the consumer, includes the following: conjunctivitis, corneal abrasions, giant papillary conjunctivitis, microbial keratitis and other forms of bacterial, allergic and microbial infection as specified by the eye care industry.

Already we know that these complications all occur with prescribed corrective lenses, which is exactly why Health Canada regulates the use of these products through opticians and regulatory bodies. What has now been shown as fact through peer reviewed studies is that non-prescribed decorative or cosmetic lenses are much more likely to cause complications to users for a combination of factors, including lack of oversight on the product for the consumer in terms of how to use the product and in terms of the potential quality of the product.

It should be noted that some businesses import cosmetic lenses from parts of the world where production of the device to be fitted into a human eye does not necessarily take the best precautions in terms of the quality of their product, leading to the rise of bacterial infections and microbial issues. These companies make large profits off a consumer base that is woefully unaware of the potential harm they are causing to their own eye sight.

A recent search on the Internet for cosmetic contact lenses Canada brought up over one million hits. The top hits on the search were for several large marketing and distributing companies that sell cosmetic lenses made in certain regions not as well-known as Canada for having strong consumer protection measures. This is extremely concerning and we can be sure that the regulatory oversight that Bill C-313 would provide should help to shed some light on the businesses that are importing and providing these products to consumers with little to no oversight or concern for the consumer of their product.

To date, we have now seen several studies on the issue of decorative lenses and the harm they can cause to consumers. Perhaps the most well-known study in Canada is the human health risk assessment of cosmetic contact lenses conducted by Dillon Consulting Limited, also known as the Dillon report. The final assessment was submitted to Health Canada in September 2003 and it outlined the scientific evidence, which at that point was still being debated by public health officials, that the level of risk associated with the use of cosmetic contact lenses was comparable to that associated with corrective lenses and maybe potentially higher. The main issue here is that corrective lenses are subject to professional monitoring and proper regulatory oversight. Cosmetic lenses are not.

• (1115)

The Dillon report also called for the following risk management strategies: individual screening should take place before a cosmetic lens is sold to a customer; proper fitting should be ensured; adequate instruction on cleaning and sterilization should occur; familiarization with recognition of potential symptoms related to the condition of the eye; and, regular aftercare.

Private Members' Business

To date, not one of the suggested risk management strategies called for in this report have been adopted, while corrective lenses are strictly defined by Health Canada. With this in mind, we must all ask the question why this has been allowed to occur for so long despite the long-standing pleas of the eye care industry and medical researchers.

To recap our discussions thus far, the main concerns Bill C-313 seeks to redress is that cosmetic or decorative cosmetic lenses are being dispensed without a prescription or fitting from unlicensed vendors. Consequently, uninformed lens wearers are experiencing acute, vision threatening infections and inflammation.

This has now become an accepted fact due to a recent study that appeared in *Acta Ophthalmologica*, the official medical journal for optometrists and ophthalmologists in Europe. In this study, research conducted at the Department of Ophthalmology at Strasbourg University Hospital in Strasbourg, France, clearly indicated that:

Patients who acquire CosCL are less likely to be instructed on appropriate lenses use and basic hygiene rules. Consequently, CosCL wearers are experiencing acute vision-threatening infections.

The study in question focused on a bacterial infection known as microbial keratitis, a common yet preventable infection that can occur in wearers of contact lenses, both corrective and non-corrective cosmetic varieties. This study has shown that wearers of cosmetic lenses were at higher risk, with 79% of the controlled group of cosmetic contact lens wearers suffering from corneal scraping. However, the study showed that only 51% of corrective contact lens wearers suffered similar affects. Meanwhile, more than half of the cosmetic lens wearers who were shown to have suffered corneal scraping were also shown to have serious microbial infection as well in the eye.

The study concludes that the increasingly documented risks of easily accessible cosmetic contact lenses were a serious concern in France where the study took place.

There is no reason to believe that the situation is any different in Canada. The Dillon report of 2003, which, in many ways, served as a groundbreaker on this issue, also came to the same conclusions as the French study in 2011.

Considering the medical evidence that clearly shows the need for the provisions contained in Bill C-313, it is important to note that Canada is at least a decade behind other jurisdictions such as the United States and Europe in achieving proper regulations for cosmetic, decorative or plano lenses.

No matter what we want to call them, it is scientific fact that there are issues with these lenses being improperly sold and used in our nation. The risk was sufficient enough that, in 2000, Health Canada issued a public health warning. In 2003, a human health risk assessment was conducted. In 2008, this House of Commons unanimously agreed with the viewpoint that cosmetic lenses were indeed a risk to Canadian consumers and that we must take action.

Although I have spoken at great length as to the risks of cosmetic contact lenses and, therefore, the need for the provisions of Bill C-313, I will share with the House a quote from Dr. Lillian Linton, president of the Canadian Association of Optometrists, who stated:

This is about people's eyesight...and in most cases young people's eyesight! There are daily news stories from around the world about the complications that can arise due to ill-fitting cosmetic lenses or improper use and handling. It is an important vision health issue and the optometrists, opticians and ophthalmologists of Canada are asking for unanimous support from the House, Senate and Health Canada to adopt this amendment and enact it with haste.

I could not agree more with Dr. Linton.

The time has come for us as parliamentarians to join together to support Bill C-313 so that we can ensure that much needed oversight is finally brought forward. In doing so, Canada can reclaim the proper regulatory powers over the importers of these products who so callously flood the Canadian market while doing untold damage to hundreds of thousands of young Canadians' eyes, completely unbeknown to most consumers, unfortunately.

With this in mind, I call on parliamentarians in the House today to stand in support of Bill C-313.

• (1120)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton very much for her excellent and very well-written bill. I do have a concern, however, and I have a question for the Conservatives.

We have seen the Conservatives neglect all issues related to the health of Canadians. Why is this measure coming from a single member instead of the government? Does the Conservative government not think it has a role to play in protecting the health of Canadians, especially when it comes to vision? I thank the member for answering my questions.

[*English*].

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue I brought forward in 2007. It was a private member's motion that was supported unanimously by the House. It was not only supported by the House, it was also supported by the government and Health Canada. That motion was put into Bill C-51 that was before the House. If it had not been for the fact that the bill died on the order paper because of an election, this would already be in legislation.

The government does support it. It has tried to bring it forward. It is not a case of the government not supporting it, or being negligent by not doing this. There has been support all the way through on this bill and on this issue from Health Canada and the government.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party has been somewhat supportive of the bill and we appreciate the member's efforts in bringing it forward.

The member touched upon a very serious issue. Many consumer advocates and others would see the merit in the bill, but there is another issue dealing with our eyes and vision. That is the whole concept of laser surgery, which is becoming more and more commonplace.

Private Members' Business

I wonder if the member could give us her thoughts in terms of what role government might have to play in this whole area that is relatively new to our health care system? Does she believe there is any merit in looking at ways in which we can support laser eye treatment, whether it is the federal government or provincial government?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, this is an issue that is definitely not addressed by the bill before the House today. Personally, I know of several people who have had laser surgery. I know of several people who have had it very successfully, but I have not done research into it. I certainly am not qualified to speak on it.

I feel that is something that is another topic. Definitely, the government is extremely interested in improving the health of all Canadians, whether it be eye health, or whatever. Therefore, if the issue was studied and it seemed to have merit, then that is a topic for another day. However, right now this bill deals with cosmetic contact lenses.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the member for Sarnia—Lambton for this very good private member's bill.

I am the father of two young daughters, 11 and 7. One will be 12 tomorrow. Happy birthday, Sarah. I will get that on the record now.

I am particularly concerned about young people using cosmetic contact lenses for decoration, even for play. Is there anything specifically in the bill that is targeted to keep children, in particular, safe from the use of cosmetic contact lenses?

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and wish Sarah a happy birthday as well.

Certainly, we know that there are a tremendous number of young people who make use of cosmetic contact lenses. It is a coincidence the bill is being introduced today on Halloween. We know that Halloween is a time when so many young people, as well as those who are not so young, make use of cosmetic contact lenses. They use them for a variety of reasons.

This bill would ensure that cosmetic contact lenses were regulated the same as corrective contact lenses. Therefore, it is seen very much by the eye care professionals, and by Health Canada, as being an extremely protective measure for our young people and the health of their eyesight.

• (1125)

[Translation]

Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, I thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for her bill. This bill must be included in Health Canada's regulations.

I will explain the issue here. In Canada, corrective contact lenses, which are different than cosmetic contact lenses, are currently regulated by Health Canada, in the category of class II medical devices. There are risks associated with wearing contact lenses, especially if they are not used properly and if people do not know how to handle them and take care of them. I will speak about these risks later on. It is important for corrective contact lenses to be in this category.

In Canada, there is a small loophole in the system when it comes to cosmetic contact lenses. Today is Halloween and some people are wearing contacts that look like cat eyes to hide their irises. These are what we refer to as cosmetic contact lenses. Right now, these contact lenses carry the same risks as corrective contact lenses, but they are not covered by the regulations. People who have vision problems must consult an optometrist to get a prescription. They then purchase their contact lenses from a health professional, who will teach them how to use them and how to take proper care of their contact lenses, which helps prevent health problems.

Right now, cosmetic contact lenses are not regulated. People who want to buy cosmetic contact lenses for different reasons can purchase them anywhere—on the Internet, at a beauty salon, and so on. The lack of regulations is part of the problem.

Many such cosmetic contact lenses can be found on the market and are of poor quality. Contact lenses should allow oxygen to flow to the eye, but lesser-quality cosmetic contact lenses can deprive the eye of oxygen, which can lead to problems. If people are not properly informed about how to care for their contact lenses, they might use them incorrectly. When contact lenses are prescribed by an optometrist, they are custom-made—each eye is even different. Wearing unregulated cosmetic contact lenses poses a greater risk because they are not fitted to the eyes.

The risks associated with using contact lenses incorrectly include allergic reactions, bacterial infections, inflammation of the cornea, cornea ulceration or abrasions, vision problems, and even blindness or the loss of an eye. These are very serious risks. Ideally, these risks would not result in the loss of an eye. However, when the misuse of contact lenses damages the cornea, the effects can be felt within the first 24 hours.

Since it is primarily young people who wear these contact lenses for esthetic reasons, they run a greater risk of having their symptoms misdiagnosed and not taking care of their eyes properly. In addition, if the diagnosis comes too late, the problem could be difficult to treat and, in some cases, could even lead to permanent blindness. That is the worst-case scenario, which we want to avoid.

The NDP and the Conservatives are not the only ones asking for the law to be changed. For the past 10 years, the Canadian Association of Optometrists, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society and the Opticians Association of Canada having been issuing warnings specifically to urge the government to pass legislation on this.

• (1130)

I am very pleased that the Conservative member is reintroducing her bill. It was a shame that it died on the order paper. Today being Halloween, it is the peak time for the use of cosmetic contact lenses. It is too bad this legislation is not covering this time of year when there is an increased use of cosmetic contact lenses, but I hope this bill will be able to help young people next Halloween and provide them with good vision health.

Private Members' Business

I would also like to quote Dr. Lillian Linton, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists. I believe it is important to seek expert advice on this, especially when this association has been calling for legislative amendments for 10 years. She said:

This is about people's eyesight...and in most cases young people's eyesight! There are daily news stories from around the world about the complications that can arise due to ill-fitting cosmetic lenses or improper use and handling.

Dr. Linton also said that this is an important vision health issue and that the optometrists, opticians and ophthalmologists of Canada are asking for unanimous support from the House, the Senate and Health Canada to adopt this amendment and enact it quickly. I am also pleased that Health Canada is willing to amend the legislation.

I will share some statistics to help the House understand how important it is to pass this bill. Among the users of corrective lenses—I am not talking about cosmetic lenses—the rate of serious injury is 1%, which is not insignificant. Those who have had a prescription for specialty contact lenses have received instructions from their health care professional on how to insert them, take care of them and remove them. Even among people who use those types of contact lenses, 1% of them have the serious injuries I was referring to earlier. The general rate of complication is roughly 10%. It is therefore very important that these contact lenses, whether they are cosmetic or corrective, be prescribed by a health care professional and delivered by a qualified person who can explain how to wear them properly.

Researchers in France recently conducted a very interesting study. They found that the risk of eye infection caused by wearing contact lenses was 12 times greater for people who wear cosmetic lenses than for people who wear corrective lenses. This again shows that people who have not been given instruction on their proper use have a greater risk of suffering health problems, which could further tax our Canadian health care system. No one here wants that.

Things are different in the United States. It had the same problem as Canada. Cosmetic contact lenses were not regulated. In 2005, the U.S. passed legislation, almost the same as the legislation proposed, for cosmetic contact lenses to be considered class II medical devices. I would have liked Canada to take the lead in this regard, but at least we can improve the vision health of Canadians.

The recent U.S. study indicated that contact lenses, both cosmetic and corrective, are the main cause of lesions in children over 11. This statistic indicates how important it is to pass this bill.

In closing, I would like to remind members that it is important that the House pass this bill. The House had already unanimously passed a similar bill, which unfortunately died on the order paper. I hope all members will support the bill.

I again thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for reintroducing her bill, which will protect the vision of all Canadians who wear contact lenses, especially young children.

•(1135)

[English]

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this private member's bill in the name of the member for Sarnia—Lambton is excellent and the Liberals will be supporting it.

This is a long time in coming. It is almost a decade since the 2000 health warning issued by Health Canada with regard to cosmetic contact lenses and regulations have not been established. What the hon. member is doing is very important. She is attempting to move cosmetic contact lenses into class II of the medical devices regulations. This means they would be treated the same way as corrective contact lenses are treated.

These measures would do a few things. They would manage the quality of products. They would regulate the distribution of contact lenses. They would increase awareness of the damage that cosmetic contact lenses can do. The member spoke to the damages which could ensue, such as, infection, vision loss and corneal damage. Those things come about because cosmetic contact lenses that are sold at the corner store or as cosmetic products and nothing more will fit badly. Ill-fitting contact lenses can cause major problems. They may also be improperly handled or housed in an inappropriate container which could cause infection. Most young people do not think they are real. They treat them like cosmetics and tend not to handle them properly. If people want to use them on Halloween, for example, they are going to look for the cheapest products and will probably buy products that are made from substandard materials which are to be used once and thrown away.

This is an important issue. It is about preventing vision loss. As the member said, the Canadian Association of Optometrists and the Opticians Association of Canada support this bill, as does the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. They say that this has been a long time coming.

In 2003 Health Canada issued a report on the risk assessment of wearing cosmetic contact lenses. Cosmetic contact lenses are relatively new, so there is no body of data going back 20 years looking at a longitudinal study of it. We know enough now to know that contact lenses, whether they are corrective or cosmetic, can interfere with the flow of oxygen to the cornea. It could cause swelling or ulceration of the cornea, which could lead to inappropriate vision entirely.

Debris or dirt can get under contact lenses if they are not handled carefully, such as if they are thrown on a table and picked up again. Micro particles can abrade the wearer's corneas. Dirt and debris can get underneath ill-fitting contact lenses. There can be chemical or allergic reactions. There can be contamination of the lenses from micro-organisms, again due to inappropriate handling when putting them in. People can get ulcerative keratitis from repeated infection of the cornea, which ultimately could lead to blindness.

It is interesting to note that contact lenses can cause a temporary change in the shape of a person's corneas. This would necessitate the use of corrective glasses because the person's corneas have changed over a period of time.

Private Members' Business

That sounds horrendous, but it is why contact lenses should be dispensed by a licensed and trained professional, such as an optician, optometrist or ophthalmologist, to ensure proper fitting, supervision and education on how to handle contact lenses.

A study in the United States showed that 79.2% of cosmetic contact lenses were illegally sold, as opposed to about 10% of prescription contact lenses which were sold illegally. There is a black market for the sale of cosmetic contact lenses. They are seen to be used for cosmetic purposes only and used only once or twice. Contact lenses have a 33% incidence of corneal ulcers, which is a particularly high percentage, and a 20% incidence of corneal abrasions.

• (1140)

What is important about this bill is that it is a preventive measure. It could prevent blindness, and I am not being hysterical in saying that. The hon. member was very clear about some of the things and this is what opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists are now saying. This is an important first step.

While we have no control over provincial governments, passing this bill could encourage them to look at this issue. They are the ones with the authority to regulate cosmetic lenses. They could make the regulations the same as those that deal with prescription lenses. That would be the next step we hope would happen. That would mean there would be regulations regarding who could prescribe and dispense cosmetic contact lenses. This is the ultimate result which I think my hon. colleague is hoping to achieve.

Young people tend to use cosmetic contact lenses a lot. They may want to have green eyes when they go to a party, or cat's eyes on Hallowe'en. They do not understand the danger and the damage that could occur. Sixty per cent of the people in theatre who wear contact lenses to change their look as part of their make-up get eye infections from using cosmetic contact lenses, as opposed to 13% who have corrective contact lenses that were prescribed by a licensed individual.

I support this bill to include cosmetic contact lenses as a class II medical device. They would be included with other devices, such as contact lenses, pregnancy tests, ultrasound scanners, endoscopes, et cetera. This ensures these medical devices are properly regulated, that the quality control is there and that they are distributed by people who are properly licensed. Manufacturers require a Health Canada licence before selling or advertising class II devices. This would mean that cosmetic lenses would require a special licence before they could be sold or dispensed. Non-corrective lenses that are designed to change the shape and colour of one's eyes need to be included in this category. As I said before, it is not only the other things we talked about, but changing the shape of a person's cornea over a period of time of using an ill-fitting lens is very dangerous.

I want to thank the hon. member for bringing forward this bill.

I want to end by quoting the United States Food and Drug Administration which said, "Without a valid prescription, fitting, supervision, or regular check-ups by a qualified eye care professional, decorative contact lenses, like all contact lenses, can cause a variety of serious injuries or conditions" which "can lead rapidly to internal ocular infection if left untreated". They can affect inside the

eye, not only the surface of the eye. It also said that uncontrolled infection can cause permanent corneal scarring. The United States declared in November 2005 that all contact lenses, corrective and non-corrective, should be under the medical device classification, requiring a prescription, an appropriate fitting and appropriate consultation.

By adding non-corrective contact lenses as a medical device under the Food and Drugs Act, we could ensure greater safety in the manufacture and sale of these lenses. Liberals support evidence-based policy and recognize that this is in keeping with good health care.

Hon. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-313, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (non-corrective cosmetic contact lenses). I congratulate the member for Sarnia—Lambton for introducing this private member's bill. It is not often that we get a chance to introduce private member's bills. This one is very well thought out. The member is a strong representative of her riding. I remember visiting her five or six years ago. She served for some time as warden of Lambton County and also as mayor of Wyoming in Plympton-Wyoming for 16 years. She has to be one of the longest serving mayors in Ontario. Certainly she is the first mayor to serve as the mayor of Plympton-Wyoming.

Many members from the west may be surprised to learn that the very first commercial oil well ever drilled not just in Canada but in North America was drilled in Oil Springs, Lambton County in 1858. The oil industry and energy industry really started in southwestern Ontario, which is still home to many petrochemical and refinery companies. It is a great area of the world that has produced strong baseball teams, strong farm families, and now a strong member of Parliament who has introduced a very good piece of legislation.

All members in the House would agree that eyesight is a gift and it is not something we should ever take for granted. We would also agree that products we put directly on our eyes should be of high quality and safe to use for those purposes. We would also agree that because our eyesight is so very important, consumers should have the information necessary to make an informed decision about whether or not to purchase the product, and once they have, they should also know how to use that product in a safe way.

For all those reasons, this private member's bill is important legislation. It would help us address a long-standing safety issue related to the sale and use of these products. Cosmetic lenses, also known as non-corrective contact lenses, are used to change the appearance of the eye. They are available in a wide range of colours and designs. They are used primarily to make a fashion statement. Today is Halloween and tonight many Canadian children and adults will either go trick or treating or to a Halloween party. Many people will be wearing costumes. These costumes often include cosmetic lenses.

Private Members' Business

While I have never used them myself, I have seen them and they sometimes can be disconcerting. I have seen red vampire eyes, yellow cat's eyes, even starry eyes. There is a wide range of cosmetic lenses. They often are purchased over the Internet or at a costume retailer, as opposed to corrective lenses which are purchased at drug stores. Unlike corrective contact lenses, there are no labelling requirements to make consumers aware of the potential health and safety risks, or to provide instructions as to their proper use and care.

Cosmetic lenses are identical to corrective lenses, with one exception. Cosmetic and corrective lenses are used in the same way and pose the same risks to human health. The only difference is that cosmetic contact lenses do not correct vision. Even though these two products pose a similar risk, they fall under two different sets of regulations and regulatory regimes. That is the problem this bill would fix.

On the one hand, corrective lenses are considered to be medical devices and are regulated under the Food and Drugs Act and the medical devices regulations. On the other hand, cosmetic contact lenses are considered to be consumer products and are regulated under the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act. The bill before us today would help to harmonize those two sets of regulations by bringing both cosmetic and corrective lenses under the Food and Drugs Act and the medical devices regulations so that there would be greater clarity for consumers and greater health and safety standards for Canadians. That would mean both cosmetic and corrective lenses would be subject to the same rules for health and safety.

•(1145)

In the last Parliament, our government introduced the Canada Consumer Product Safety Act, which is strong legislation. It came into force earlier this year with support from both sides of the House. It strengthens the product and the protection of health and safety of Canadians by requiring suppliers of consumer products to report any safety-related incidents, including serious injuries or deaths, and to report any recalls or any other regulatory action in other jurisdictions.

As a consumer product, cosmetic lenses are regulated under the new legislation. It means that defective cosmetic lenses could be recalled by Health Canada if they posed an unreasonable danger to human health and safety.

However, while the new legislation will give Health Canada the powers of recall and while it is a much improve regulatory framework under which we will regulate consumer products in Canada, it does have one hole in it. The problem is it does not require companies selling these cosmetic lenses to meet the same labelling and consumer instruction standards. That is exactly what Bill C-313 would fix. It would fix this problem by regulating cosmetic lenses as medical devices under the Food and Drugs Act and the Medical Devices Regulations.

It would also require companies to report problems and provide additional information if Health Canada requested it. It would also ensure that all cosmetic lenses met the same regulatory standards as corrective lenses, in other words, the same standards as class II medical devices. Most important, it would ensure that proper information be contained on the packages to allow consumers to make an informed choice as to whether to buy the product and if

they bought the product, what the proper use of the product would be to ensure eye safety.

Bill C-313 would require that cosmetic lenses meet specific labelling requirements, including instructions for use on the product label. It would provide consumers instructions on how to use the product safely and effectively, which would go a long way in reducing the risks associated with cosmetic contact lenses.

It is important to point out one thing. The legislation would, in no way, mandate prescriptions for cosmetic lenses. Whether to require prescriptions for lenses is a decision of the provinces and the legislation would not change that fact.

However, there are two other important aspects of the legislation that are worth pointing out.

The legislation would simplify the Canadian regulatory framework by bringing both corrective and cosmetic lenses under the same regulatory framework, as opposed to the current situation, which is where one is regulated under one act and the other is regulated under another act. This would ensure that both products would be regulated in a similar fashion.

The second thing it would do is harmonize our regulations with our largest trading partner. Since 2005, all cosmetic lenses sold in the United States have been regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Currently, many Canadian consumers who purchase these products are confused because many of these cosmetic lenses have labels on them that say "FDA approved". They are confused as to whether they are safe for use in Canada. They are also concerned when they see products that have not been labelled in a similar fashion. The bill would ensure harmonization of cross-border regulations between Canada and our largest trading partner.

I want to once again congratulate the member for bringing forward the legislation. It would allow consumers to continue to have access to high-quality, safe cosmetic lenses. It would simplify our Canadian regulatory framework. It would harmonize the regulations with that of our largest trading partner. Most important, it would require full information be put on the package to allow consumers to make an informed decision about purchasing the product and, once purchased, ensure that consumers would have all the information required in order to use these cosmetic lenses safely.

For all these reasons, I encourage members of the House to support the legislation. I congratulate the member for bringing it forward.

•(1150)

[Translation]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank my colleague from Sarnia—Lambton for introducing this bill. I think it is very important.

Private Members' Business

We must protect Canadians' ocular health. This very simple measure will help reduce the number of eye injuries. Cosmetic contact lenses must be subject to the same regulations as corrective lenses because they present the same health risks. Bill C-313 will help fix a problem that health care professionals have been calling on the government to fix for years.

One of the primary responsibilities of the government should be to protect Canadians from potentially dangerous products. The bill would ensure that corrective contact lenses and cosmetic contact lenses are subject to the same government regulations, since their use presents the same health risks.

Over the past 10 years, health care professionals have warned Canadians about the risks and dangers associated with using unregulated cosmetic lenses. In 2000, Health Canada issued a warning about cosmetic contact lenses and recommended that they be used only under the supervision of an eye care professional. In 2003, Health Canada recommended that the federal government regulate the use of cosmetic contact lenses.

The risks associated with using cosmetic contact lenses without professional oversight have been extensively documented. Problems occur when the contacts are not fitted to the eye—like shoe size, eye size varies greatly from one person to another—when the contacts are of questionable quality, or when they come from a truly unknown supplier.

Problems often occur when consumers are not given the appropriate and necessary information and instructions on how to use the contacts safely, for example, how to put them in, how to take them out and how to clean them.

Cosmetic contact lenses can be quite funky and there are many different types—there are some that look like soccer balls, some that make the iris appear larger, and other sometimes very funny things. Many young people share these contacts but they definitely should not in order to avoid infection.

Cosmetic contact lenses are becoming increasingly popular and, since today is Halloween, they are being sold absolutely everywhere: in convenience stores, beauty salons, and so on.

According to a report published by Health Canada in 2003, the rate of serious injury among people using corrective contact lenses every day is approximately 1% and the overall rate of complication is about 10%. It is estimated that the rate of injury and complication—for example, infection, inflammation or ulceration—is much higher among cosmetic contact lens users.

In 2007, vision loss accounted for the Canadian health care system's highest direct cost, as compared to any other illness. Doctors also say that wearing these contacts prevents people from seeing contrasts properly. Contact lenses reduce the eyes' sensitivity. It is sometimes very difficult to see when wearing cosmetic contacts because there is something in the eye. This results in improper vision. Someone who is wearing them while driving could even cause an accident.

• (1155)

There are many viruses and bacteria that attack the eyes, and we never know which may attack our eyes. This can happen if we share

lenses with a friend who has an infection. So we have to be very cautious when we share contact lenses with other people. The best thing is simply not to do it at all.

Wearing cosmetic contact lenses can lead to a lot of other problems.

These contact lenses are meant to be worn up to a certain date. There is an expiry date, as for milk. Often, people who wear them forget to take them out and throw them in the garbage. That leads to various complications, such as corneal ulcers. Corneal ulcers are genuinely dangerous and can cause scarring of the eyes. That is truly dangerous. If they are not treated, the ulcers can even lead to permanent loss of sight.

Even though cosmetic contact lenses seem harmless, they can cause eye injuries in a person who wears them: an allergic reaction, a bacterial infection, swelling or inflammation of the cornea, and ulceration or scratching of the cornea. These sight problems can become permanent.

Some of these injuries occur in less than 24 hours. They can be very difficult to treat and in some cases can become permanent. The potential risks associated with this type of contact lens are a known fact. As well, there are numerous studies and there is considerable evidence showing the potential dangers associated with misuse of cosmetic contact lenses without supervision by a specialist.

But passing this bill is merely the first step. What the federal government has to do is work with the provinces and territories to establish an effective regulatory scheme for cosmetic contact lenses.

We are talking a lot about Halloween. As mothers, we look for clothing to use for costumes. My little boy, who is 10 years old, has asked for contact lenses for his costume. I therefore think that regulation is very appropriate, and I congratulate my colleague opposite on her bill.

I join my colleagues in the NDP in supporting this bill.

• (1200)

[English]

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Sarnia—Lambton, whose constituency is next door to mine, for bringing forward her bill, Bill C-313. I also acknowledge that she and I have spent time working together in terms of being a mayor. I think she holds the title of a warden of a county, elected more times and for a longer period than anyone of whom I know.

Bill C-313 would amend the Food and Drugs Act. Much has been said this morning about the significance of the bill. It is clearly one that wants to see cosmetic contact lenses classified and regulated as medical devices. It appears that the cosmetic contact lenses and, in fact, the corrective lenses go through the same process in their development. It is actually the oversight of the regulatory concerns that go with it.

Business of Supply

The member and I both wear glasses. We come with two sets of eyes. These products are mostly used by younger people. We need to ensure that what we do we do for the best health of Canadians. I know all of us in this place come forward today to ensure that we do what we can to protect the health of Canadians.

Today I hear support for the bill. I want to congratulate my colleague for bringing forward this important issue on the health of our eyes.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business is now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

The hon. member for Lambton—Kent—Middlesex will have eight minutes remaining when this matter returns to the House.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1205)

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ASBESTOS

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should: (a) ban the use and export of asbestos; (b) support international efforts to add chrysotile asbestos to the list of hazardous chemical products under the Rotterdam Convention; (c) assist affected workers by developing a Just Transition Plan with measures to accommodate their re-entry into the workforce; (d) introduce measures dedicated to affected older workers, through the employment insurance program, to assure them of a decent standard of living until retirement; and (e) support communities and municipalities in asbestos producing regions through an investment fund for regional economic diversification.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to introduce this New Democratic Party motion calling for a ban on the use and export of all forms of asbestos and a just transition plan for asbestos-producing workers and communities.

I am especially honoured to share my time with my colleague from Winnipeg Centre. Like me, he was exposed early to asbestos and he became a tenacious labour leader for health and safety rights for workers. Since his election 14 years ago, in 1997, he has championed in this House the ban on asbestos.

Today we are closer to that than ever before. I am grateful for my colleague, for my New Democratic Party and for a broad coalition of national and international health care, trade union and human rights advocates that have fought this fight.

Let us not mince words: asbestos is extremely harmful. Asbestos kills. This is a substance so noxious that it has been banned from manufacturing processes in Canada, yet we export it to countries such as India, where our government has accepted the absurd claim that it is safe to use. For a government that purports to be friendly to immigrants, this is real hypocrisy.

The medical community has been clear and unanimous in refuting the industry argument that although asbestos is dangerous, chrysotile is just fine. There may be different forms of asbestos; they may have

varying chemical makeups and different lengths of shapes and fibres, but they all produce disease, some worse than others.

As Canadians and as a country with international responsibilities, we know that the right thing to do is to ban the extraction and exporting of asbestos.

[*Translation*]

The scientific debate on chrysotile asbestos is over. The overwhelming consensus in the scientific community is clear: chrysotile asbestos does cause serious harm to human health, there is no safe way to use it, and it should be banned. Credible sources estimate that over 100,000 people die every year around the world as a result of asbestos-related diseases.

[*English*]

Yet we also know the mineral is caught up in the story of hard-working people in the towns of Asbestos and Thetford Mines. They are hard-working miners making a livelihood for themselves and their loved ones. From my 34 years of working in a mine, I know the story too well.

It is also the right thing to ensure that older asbestos workers have a decent standard of living through retirement. We need to broaden the disability compensation to include all victims of asbestos-related diseases in Canada and we must create an investment fund to support the diversification of the economy in asbestos-producing regions. We will speak about these and other policies to help those workers throughout this debate.

I read recently one of the community leaders in Quebec thought there would be shame for his workers and his community to have asbestos added to the list of chemicals banned for import by the Rotterdam Convention. While I understand his comments, in truth there is no shame for those workers. They have gone into the mine shafts shift after shift, day after day, and with the sweat of their brow have put food on the table for their families. They believed what they were told by their bosses and by those making money from asbestos, who, like the tobacco companies from another time, spun misinformation and doubt.

The real shame today is for the Conservative government and the Prime Minister, who unconscionably stand with only three other countries in the world in refusing to act. On three occasions since 2008, the Conservative government has blocked international efforts to list asbestos on the UN's list of hazardous substances. Asbestos is banned in more than 50 countries, including most developed nations, but Canada continues to be one of the leading producers and exporters of asbestos. Canada exports nearly 200,000 tonnes per year into poor and developing nations. That is more than any other country in the world.

Business of Supply

Listing asbestos in the convention would force exporters such as Canada to warn recipient countries of any health hazards. Those countries could also then refuse asbestos imports if they thought they could not handle the product safely. Rotterdam listings are determined by consensus, and if there are countries that oppose, like Canada, then a substance like asbestos cannot be listed.

The workers in developing nations lack basic health protection. They are often unaware about safety measures. They do not receive training to instruct them on how to handle asbestos at the least risk to their lives.

• (1210)

[*Translation*]

Internal Health Canada documents reveal that, as far back as 2006, department officials refuted the Conservatives' claim that chrysotile asbestos is safe. The director general of Health Canada's safe environments program even said, "We cannot say that chrysotile is safe. Health Canada's preferred position would be to include it on the list, as this would be consistent with controlled use."

Under the auspices of this Prime Minister, Canada has sponsored and paid for 160 trade missions in 60 countries to promote asbestos. Over the past three years, this government has also granted \$150,000 to the Chrysotile Institute, a lobby group in the asbestos sector that promotes the product abroad.

[*English*]

"Adding asbestos to the list is the wise thing to do". Those are not only words; they are the words of former Conservative cabinet minister Chuck Strahl. We are all familiar with his story, his courageous battle against cancer and how this subject touches him.

As an industrialized country, we must put the global good before domestic political consideration. We came to know in this country how dangerous asbestos was. We banned it, right here in Parliament. We closed entire buildings and we are spending millions of dollars because we know how dangerous asbestos is. What is unsafe here cannot be safe once it arrives in another country.

I implore the government, the Prime Minister, and the hon. member from the region to do the right thing. If their opposition is the loss of jobs, then let us work together on a transition plan to invest in those communities and regions. In doing so, we can save lives here and around the globe.

In closing, I want to cite the commentary of a broad coalition of eminent doctors in Quebec who have written to the Prime Minister with their compelling questions.

[*Translation*]

They wrote:

Given that you, Mr. Prime Minister, and the current Canadian government believe in the safe use of chrysotile asbestos, and considering its recognized harmfulness, what is the problem with subjecting it to the prior informed consent procedure under the Rotterdam Convention? Why would Canada be opposed to allowing countries that import chrysotile to have all pertinent information when making their decision? Why is Canada afraid of not supporting the decision to include chrysotile on the list? We see no reason to oppose this and every reason to support it.

As doctors and Canadian citizens, we want to be proud of the role our country plays on the international scene.

[*English*]

I would like to read from an email I received yesterday. It is from Tracy:

My dad died of mesothelioma in 2008. After learning that asbestos-related diseases are the number one occupational killer in Canada and that there was no fund to support organizations working on asbestos-related initiatives, my mom and I established the Asbestos-related Research, Education and Advocacy fund. We have been truly shocked by this government's actions and position on this issue. The Harper government's excuses are embarrassing and unforgivable...

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. I remind the hon. member that he cannot refer to members of the chamber by their given names, even in a quote.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for that.

In the name of justice and protection of workers here and around the world, in the name of our obligations to others on our planet, I urge MPs in all parties to support this motion.

• (1215)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in support of the motion put forward by the hon. member for Nickel Belt.

I am proud of the fact that the Green Party was the first federal political party to call for an end to the asbestos industry in Canada and a just transition for its workers.

We now face world disapproval for our quite immoral position that somehow chrysotile asbestos can be used safely in other countries while we recognize that it kills people here. I would like to ask the hon. member for Nickel Belt what information he has regarding the World Health Organization's position on the Canadian support of asbestos.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, even though the Green Party has supported this position for a long time, I would like to again thank and refer to my colleague from Winnipeg, because had he not done due diligence on this file, we might not be discussing this today.

However, it is quite clear that the international community supports the ban of asbestos throughout the world. It is a substance that is dangerous. It is a substance that kills. It is a substance that we should not import or export to third world countries that are not protected against the use of asbestos.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments that my colleague has made.

I have a constituent, Julius Hava, who is struggling right now to stay alive because of this illness.

The problem here is that not only do a lot of people in Canada and across the world suffer from this illness, but the fact of the matter is that in Canada it is very difficult to get treatment for it.

Business of Supply

Julius's wife, Martina, says this should never have happened: "Do not take me wrong. We still believe that miracles might happen and God could cure Julius". She goes on to say that she thought this was the best country in the world, and now she is ashamed to be Canadian.

Does the hon. member think that Canadians who are struck by this disease should have access to medical assistance immediately? If there is a problem between WSIB and the provincial government, should it be dealt with in a way similar to what Jordan's principle was meant to do?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, if people affected by asbestos in Canada are having problems getting medical attention in a country like Canada, think about the people in India, where we export this product.

The government of the day tries to lay claim that it is the protector of immigrants in Canada, but with the exportation of asbestos, we are killing some of their brothers and sisters in their home country. We are killing some of their parents. We are killing their cousins, but we still do not want to ban it for some ideological reason. The government should be ashamed of not wanting to ban this substance.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Nickel Belt for proposing the motion in the House.

Given the substantial amount of information that is out there about the dangers of not only mining asbestos but also using it, and given the fact that it is not only the miners who suffer with related cancers but also often their families because the miners come home with their clothing full of asbestos, I would like to ask the member to comment as to whether he can see any logical reason whatsoever why Canada would not support the Rotterdam Convention?

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right. Not only are miners affected by this but so can their children or wives when miners come home with their clothes full of asbestos. There is absolutely no reason for not banning the substance.

I wish to quote from an email I received, "My husband died of mesothelioma and I belong to Canada's Voice of Asbestos Victims. Canada's export of asbestos to developing countries has to stop. Here are all the Canadian organizations who agree with your motion".

It goes on to list the many organizations. I do not have enough time to list them all, but there is a full page of organizations that support the ban of asbestos.

•(1220)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have an opportunity to join in this debate, which has been a long time coming and is long overdue.

Asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known. More Canadians die from asbestos than from all other industrial and occupational-related causes combined, and yet Canada continues to be one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world. On a good year we dump nearly 200,000 tonnes into underdeveloped and developing nations.

Not only is asbestos not banned in Canada, as it is in as many as 50 developed nations, but we have spent millions of dollars and

continue to spend millions of dollars subsidizing and promoting the asbestos industry. No other Canadian commodity enjoys the amount of support that asbestos does. This class A carcinogen enjoys an irrational affinity of the Government of Canada, which made 160 trade junkets to 60 different countries using our embassies, trade commissioners, and our foreign missions to promote something that we Canadians ourselves would not allow our children to be exposed to.

It is the height of hypocrisy that we are spending tens of millions of dollars to remove all of the asbestos from the Parliament Buildings because no MP should ever be exposed to a single fibre, and yet we promote and subsidize the export of thousands of tonnes per year to underdeveloped nations where there are virtually no health and safety protocols.

We are exporting human misery on a monumental scale and there is no justification or excuse for it. We are exporting a made in Canada epidemic. It is like unleashing a thousand Bhopal's into India in a timed release way because we know that the legacy of disease and death stemming from this is undeniable.

Who agrees with us? The World Health Organization, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Cancer Society have all recently said that asbestos should be banned in all its forms and that Canada should be out of the asbestos industry.

We do not even have to take active steps to shut down the asbestos industry. All we have to do is turn off the tap of corporate welfare, the millions of dollars in direct and indirect subsidies to the industry. I call it corporate welfare for corporate serial killers. It is indefensible. Canadians would be horrified to know the extent of our involvement in the asbestos cartel.

I agree with Keith Spicer, a veteran Canadian journalist, who said recently that Canada's position on asbestos is morally and ethically reprehensible. He wrote this in Paris, where notably, France was one of the first countries in the European Union to ban asbestos in all of its forms. Canada went to the World Trade Organization in 1999 to try to stop France from banning its asbestos. Fortunately, for the people of France, Canada lost and that led to the entire European Union banning asbestos in all of its forms.

No amount of money is going to take the stink off the asbestos industry. Imagine a lobby organization being funded by the government to lobby the government. That is how irrational our approach to asbestos is. We not only spend money subsidizing the industry directly but we subsidize it in an indirect way as well. We sent a team of Department of Justice lawyers all over the world like globe-trotting propagandists to try to block other countries from curbing its use. It is incredible.

Business of Supply

I went to Rome at my own expense and observed the Canadian delegation sabotage the Rotterdam convention in an effort to keep asbestos off the list of hazardous materials. The Rotterdam convention does not even ban hazardous chemicals. It just says that if they are going to be sold then they must include a warning label and a caution to the end user. In other words, informed prior consent that the end user knows that it is a carcinogen.

Canada has consistently blocked asbestos being listed on the Rotterdam convention because it would interfere with our ability to market it in the third world. When commercialization trumps science and reason, logic, morality and ethics, then we are in a serious situation.

• (1225)

There are those who would have us believe that there is something magically benign about the asbestos that we mine here in Canada. Ninety-five per cent of all the asbestos ever mined in the world is chrysotile, the type that we mine here. I used to work in the asbestos mines. We were lied to about the health hazards of asbestos then, just as the world continues to be lied to about the health hazards of chrysotile today. All asbestos kills. Chrysotile asbestos is a class A carcinogen, according to Health Canada, the World Health Organization, the Canadian Medical Association and the Canadian Cancer Society.

Time does not permit me to go through the history of Canada's irrational affinity for this carcinogen. The asbestos industry has been like the tobacco industry's evil twin, in that they both have relied for more than a century on junk science, the best science money can buy; on aggressive public relations campaigns, domestically and internationally; and on intense political lobbying.

That is how the asbestos industry has pulled the wool over the eyes of the world for a generation. Canada plays an integral role in the activities of the asbestos cartel because it relies on Canada's boy scout image. The asbestos industry tells the world that if a nice country like Canada thinks asbestos is okay, it must be okay. That boy scout image is being severely tarnished. Canada is being viewed as an international pariah for our involvement in the asbestos industry.

Let me suggest that the money we spend subsidizing the asbestos industry would be better spent on starting a national registry to track and monitor the incidence of asbestos-related disease across the country. It would be better spent to improve the diagnostics and treatment of asbestos-related disease because if we are going to be one of the largest exporters of exporters to the world, surely we should be a centre of excellence for the diagnostics and treatment of asbestos-related disease.

In actual fact, Canadians who are struck down with mesothelioma more often than not have to go to the United States to get decent diagnostics and treatment. The money that we spend subsidizing the asbestos industry now would be better used putting in place a testing and remediation program so that Canadian homeowners, whose biggest single investment is contaminated by this Canadian epidemic, would be given a chance to test for asbestos and remove it when found. That would be a good use of government tax dollars.

The Government of Canada participated in contaminating hundreds of thousands of Canadian homes through its CHIP, a home insulation program in the late 1970s and early 1980s. One of the products the government was subsidizing was called zonolite, which is loaded with tremolite asbestos. It contaminated the attics of hundreds of thousands of homes, subsidized and promoted its installation and then left homeowners with this liability, not only making their homes unsafe but devaluing them as well. That would be a good use of Canadian tax dollars in relation to this particular carcinogen.

In my final minute, I would like to make members aware of an open letter that was sent to the member for Simcoe—Grey, a medical doctor who recently received national recognition for her work in the protection of children. This letter is signed by hundreds of doctors around the country, urging the member for Simcoe—Grey, as a Conservative member of Parliament, to live up to her Hippocratic oath and not support the Conservative government's irrational and dangerous position on asbestos. In fact, the letter makes an urgent appeal to the member to stand with science and research, and not with the political and commercial considerations that have kept this deadly industry killing people for much longer than it ever should.

Let the asbestos industry die a natural death. Turn off the tap of corporate welfare and, believe me, it will go the way of all the other asbestos mines in the country and Canada will be out of this deadly industry.

• (1230)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise to commend the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre for his years of dedicated service in raising this issue. He has been a champion on this file. I have only one question for him.

Can we, with compassion and respect toward members on the opposite side of the House, find ways to get them to at long last join all the other parties in this House who now see the danger of asbestos? How do we break through the barrier that continues to allow Canada to argue an unscientific and indefensible position in the world community?

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I, too, recognize the long-standing support by the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands for this global movement to ban asbestos. Often, she and I were the only ones at events, functions and rallies to bring the public's attention to this issue.

Business of Supply

She raises an important point. There is zero scientific evidence to support the government side. There is one study, which has never been peer tested, by a man named David Bernstein that the Chrysotile Institute paid \$1 million to have written. It is so absurd that not a medical doctor in the world has ever ratified or peer tested it. One of the points. Dr. Bernstein makes on behalf of the Conservative government is that ingesting chrysotile asbestos is actually good for people in the sense that it triggers their bodies' immune system to try to expel it. He went on to explain that it was like flexing a muscle. The body's immune system is mobilized to get rid of asbestos. It is so absurd it is almost comical.

The rest of the scientific community is united in saying that all asbestos kills, that there is nothing benign about Canadian chrysotile asbestos and that Canada should get out of the asbestos industry.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to read a quote for the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre and I would like him to comment on it. This quote was by Stephen Lewis at Concordia University on October 5. He stated, "It is beyond belief that we are exporting death. And we are exporting it wilfully and knowledgeably. I don't understand it. I don't understand the government and this province, Quebec, and I don't understand the Government of Canada. There is no asbestos anywhere that is safe, none, and it is unimaginable that we are willing to sacrifice lives in developing countries to support a relatively handful of jobs in the Canadian economy".

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, I do not think that poignant remark needs any additional comment. It is a widely-held view. First, most Canadians thinks that asbestos is banned in Canada. It is not. Canada even sabotaged the United States. When the United States tried to ban asbestos in 1992, Canada unleashed Allan Gottlieb and Derek Burney. Every senior diplomat in the country swept down and managed to block congress' bill to ban asbestos in all its forms. Had it done so 20 years ago, I believe a domino effect would have taken place and the world would have stopped the trade and traffic of Canadian asbestos.

Instead, we are the world's number one cheerleader and sabotage other countries' efforts to curb its use at every opportunity. We go to the WTO and file grievances whenever some country wants to ban asbestos. We twist the arms of small developing nations. We give them foreign aid with one hand on the condition that they keep supporting the asbestos industry. On the other hand, it is morally and ethically reprehensible, in the words of Keith Spicer.

Mr. Ted Hsu (Kingston and the Islands, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I bought a house about four years ago that had vermiculite in the attic. It was tested and found to contain tremolite asbestos. I had to pay thousands of dollars to have it properly removed.

I was wondering if the member might tell us when Canada banned that particular form of insulation containing asbestos as a precedent for dealing with it.

• (1235)

Mr. Pat Martin: Mr. Speaker, all forms of asbestos are heavily regulated in Canada. Zonolite insulation is no longer sold, not because it is banned but because of the liability associated with it. The manufacturer is bankrupt now because of class action suits against him. However, we are stuck with hundreds of thousands of homes contaminated by Zonolite insulation that was subsidized and

promoted by the federal government under its CHIP, home insulation program.

When UFFI foam was put in the same program, the government immediately put in place a UFFI foam removal program and stripped all foam insulation. While UFFI foam was irritating to some people with allergies, Zonolite asbestos insulation is deadly. It is loaded with tremolite, which is the most virulent form of asbestos. If the government is going to subsidize anything in the asbestos industry, it should be a testing and remediation program to help homeowners make their homes safe and stop the devaluation that takes place when their attics are full of Zonolite.

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be splitting my time with the member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

I will take a few minutes to talk about the great things that are happening in our natural resources sector and our resource-based communities across the country. As most hon. members would know, Canada navigated the global economic downturn far better than most other countries. The global recession hit Canada later, affected us less severely and we emerged stronger than other G7 nations.

Our economy has delivered and developed more than 465,000 new jobs since 2009. International bodies, such as the International Monetary Fund, are predicting Canada will continue to be a leader in economic growth.

While the economic picture is now brighter, it is important to remember that our economic future remains fragile, and that is why our government will continue to focus on creating jobs, creating growth and expanding opportunities for Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

Unlike the opposition, our government recognizes that Canada's traditional industries still remain very crucial to our economy. We have always stood firmly behind Canada's forestry, mineral and energy sectors and we will continue to support them as they innovate and grow.

On the other hand, we hear the NDP members standing in the House again and again in opposition to our resource sectors. From a western Canadian perspective, if we are talking about the oil sands, we hear members oppose standing and opposing every measure that would actually grow this important sector. They join with foreign interests, for example, they oppose Keystone XL, the northern gateway and the twinning of the Trans Mountain pipeline. It seems they are opposed to all economic development dealing with the resource sector.

Furthermore, they oppose all of these important projects typically before the independent regulators even review the projects for the environmental impact.

On forestry, the NDP has also found it difficult to actually support workers and the rural economy. The member for Winnipeg Centre at committee a year ago said:

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If we were talking big picture, about a sustainable future, we wouldn't be talking about a better way to cut down more trees and build with material that begins to rot the moment you use it. We would be talking about a way to build things without....

That is a pretty clear example of how the NDP fails to support our resource-based economies. It does not realize that our natural resource sectors are doing a great job to fuel Canada's economy. They are doing a great job in creating Canadian jobs. They are actually leading the economic recovery that is now under way.

In 2010, the energy, mining and forestry sectors accounted for \$140 billion in real GDP. They are supporting hundreds of thousands of jobs in rural communities right across the country. Today, our country's mining sector is proving to be a powerful engine for our economic success.

We all know that Canada is one of the largest mining nations in the world. We produce more than 60 minerals and metals. Canadian mining companies are located in more than 100 countries around the globe, involved in more than 10,000 projects and with assets outside of Canada worth over \$110 billion in 2009.

In 2010, Canada's mining and mineral processing industry generated over \$35 billion in GDP, over \$12 billion in capital investment and \$18 billion in trade surplus.

Our mining industry is also a powerful engine for job creation. Last year, more than 308,000 Canadians were directly employed in mining, exploration and mineral processing with many more in related industries. Many of these jobs are found in rural and remote communities across Canada. We know that for every dollar we spend on public geoscience, the industry invests, on average, \$5 in new exploration. So there is a strong return for the money that is spent on science. At the same time as, this industry is facing real challenges, declining base metal reserves, increased competition from abroad and concerns about its social and—

•(1240)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Maybe the hon. member and my colleague on the natural resources committee did not understand the motion. It is about asbestos. He has talked about the economy, oil sands, forestry and science, but not about asbestos. We are here today to talk about asbestos that kills Canadians, not only in Canada but globally. We would like the member to—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): As the member for Nickel Belt knows, the Chair is in the habit of allowing members the opportunity to work their way back to the subject at hand and I trust that the hon. parliamentary secretary will get to the matter before the House.

Mr. David Anderson: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker. We are talking about our mining industry and, today, I want to help my colleague understand the broader picture in which we find ourselves in Canada. It is important for him to listen and learn from this.

We have done some things that are encouraging our mining industry. We have extended the mineral exploration tax credit for another year. We are supporting the targeted geoscience initiative and the green mining initiative, which are all designed to foster the industry's environmental footprint. The member opposite wants to talk about the environmental footprint and we are certainly doing that.

We are also striving to improve our regulatory system for major projects and for the mining projects that are taking place in this country. For too long, our resource projects have been stuck in an inefficient regulatory system. Our objective has been clear, we want to move toward a one project, one review process that will continue to protect the environment, as the NDP claims that it is concerned about, while speeding up the process and providing clearer areas of responsibility for every project that has to be considered.

All these initiatives are done with the same goals in mind, and that is boosting Canada's economy and creating jobs in rural and remote communities. As the member opposite would know, many remote communities are benefiting from the boom in mining activity right across this country.

At committee, we have been exploring this very thing. We have been taking a look, in particular, at the geo-mapping for energy and minerals initiative that is taking place in this country. It is helping to unlock opportunities across the country, particularly in the north, that will bring real economic benefits and long-term jobs for local residents.

I guess I should maybe mention an example or two. The Meadowbank gold mine in Nunavut is a good example of how our government's geoscience is supporting mineral exploration and development in the north. It is one of a new generation of northern mines that are bringing direct benefits to Inuit communities while ensuring that we protect the environment.

I should point out that more than 39% of the mine's workforce is Inuit. Mine construction operations have also contributed more than \$1.26 billion to the community and northern-based suppliers over the last three years. Last year, the mine dispensed about \$10 million in royalties.

I think I need to cover another pillar of Canada's natural resources economy, and I will just touch quickly on forestry before I get back to the specific issue that the member opposite wanted us to address.

I want to assure members that we are standing behind workers who depend on the forest industry in hundreds of Canadian communities. Even at the best of times, these hard-working men and women face many challenges. Now, during the ongoing global difficulties, their challenges are that much greater. The economic downturn has certainly caused uncertainty and volatility in our economy, and forestry is no exception.

Our government is making strategic investments to ensure a solid future for workers in Canada's forest sector and the communities that depend on it. We recently delivered another instalment on our commitment to the forest industry. Our government is investing almost \$90 million in 13 projects to build a more sustainable and competitive forest sector in Canada. These projects range from improving energy efficiency at the Meadow Lake Mechanical Pulp mill in Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan, to helping a Boyle, Alberta mill diversify its products to include methanol.

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Funding is delivered through federal programs that are supporting the renewal and transition of our—

• (1245)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, my English comprehension is starting to improve. I do not think forestry has anything to do with asbestos. Can we hear at the wording of today's opposition motion? Are we talking about asbestos or forestry? I will have to adjust my speech accordingly. There is something that does not add up today.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): As I said to the hon. member for Nickel Belt a few moments ago, the Chair gives speakers the opportunity to work their way toward the matter before the House today. I trust that the parliamentary secretary will do that. There is one minute remaining in his speech.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I know I would be up here much longer if the members opposite had not been interrupting and shortening my speech.

I am glad to talk about natural resources and the importance—

[*Translation*]

Hon. Denis Coderre: Mr. Speaker, I am trying to understand. I asked you a question. Are we talking about asbestos or forestry today? Is this NDP opposition day on the impact of chrysotile asbestos or something else? We will have to adjust our speeches. I just want to know whether we are talking about forestry or asbestos today.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair would be pleased to provide a copy of the motion for the hon. member for Bourassa so that he could verify the contents of today's debate.

The hon. member for Crowfoot.

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the speech because it lays out for the opposition the fact that asbestos is a mining operation, not grown on trees as the member for Bourassa seems to believe.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I heard you say that you should provide the hon. member for Bourassa with a copy of the motion today. Could I suggest that you supply a copy to the present speaker so he could talk about it?

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the hon. parliamentary secretary for avoiding the topic of asbestos altogether. Giving a speech that does not mention it is the only morally defensible position.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I would ask all hon. members to allow the parliamentary secretary to complete his remarks.

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, you generously stated that you would allow speakers to work their way toward the issue in question. There is one minute remaining in the hon. member's speech. I believe he would now be addressing asbestos in the last minute if he—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): I appreciate all the assistance the hon. members have offered the Chair in this regard. I

would like to go back to the hon. parliamentary secretary so he can complete his remarks.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I guess I am disappointed that the member for Bourassa was not a bit more informed before he came to the House. He maybe should have read the motion ahead of time. He would know that it deals with natural resources and, certainly, to try to develop a greener, more diversified and sustainable industry across the country, which is what we are trying to do.

I would like to talk about the fact that rural communities across the country that depend on natural resources can depend on the support of this government. They know we have a pro-grow strategy that is opposed by the opposition. However, we will create jobs right across the country, whether it is in Quebec, Atlantic Canada, Ontario, the Prairies or British Columbia. The NDP's agenda would do exactly the opposite, which is to destroy those resource extraction jobs that Canadians count on and upon which so many communities are dependent.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the hon. member that has nothing to do with geo-mapping, or forestry or the oil sands. I am going to partially quote from a long email that I received from Brian White from Sarnia. He states:

Please know that from a community where over 11,000 people have been killed or made gravely ill due to asbestos exposure, we are standing in solidarity to have this exportation stopped. We know the effects of this deadly product and do not wish to make a dime off of anyone else who will suffer as we have in this community. From the bottom of my heart, please stop this unethical industry.

Would the hon. member comment about asbestos and not forestry, or geo-mapping or whatever else he has on his mind? The motion is about asbestos.

• (1250)

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, we sympathize with workers across the country who may find themselves in a dangerous situation. I come from a farming background. We know that farming is one of the most dangerous occupations in the country as is mining. Therefore, we stand with miners across the country when they find themselves in a situation where their jobs are a danger.

However, Canada has one of the strongest regulatory environments around the world when it comes to our natural resource sectors. We are prepared to work again to create jobs through that development of our economy. We certainly stand strong, in terms of the regulatory structures. If we take a look at things like the nuclear industry, for example, the CNSC is a very strong regulator. In terms of the pipelines and so forth, the NEB stands strong as a regulator. Our offshore boards protect Canadians workers. There are many regulations across the country. We often hear that environmental assessments need to be done to protect workers and the environment, and we are in favour of that.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, could the parliamentary secretary tell us if the government has independent scientific reports on the health impacts of asbestos and if it does, is he willing to table those? Perhaps if he will not table them, he might put them in a video on his website.

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Would he also tell us whether there is any reason why the House should believe that when materials containing chrysotile asbestos are cut, or scraped, or filed, or sanded or removed, people always take precautions to avoid getting cancer, for example, to avoid those health impacts?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Industry has been clear on this. He has answered this question many times in the House and has explained it to the members opposite.

I am intrigued. Now that the Liberals are not in government, they appear to be changing their position on this issue. For a long time they had a different position than they do now. I would ask my colleagues across the way this. When did they decide to change their position? I do not think it was done through any sense of ethics or morality. They probably thought there was some political gain for them, and I am not sure that is actually the case.

However, the Minister of Industry has been clear on this. He has explained to the House many times that there are in fact places where chrysotile can be used safely. The government would certainly not support anything that would not be safe for workers.

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is good to hear my hon. colleague across the way talk about ethics and morality.

We have quotes from the Prime Minister, who is a vigorous proponent of the asbestos industry. On April 7, he said, "Only the Conservative party will defend this industry here and everywhere in Canada". Yet the building right next to this place is closed to members of Parliament as workers carefully extract this deadly substance.

Could the hon. member speak to the issue of morality and ethics as it pertains to this issue and the hypocrisy that the government seems to have displayed?

Mr. David Anderson: Mr. Speaker, I can talk to the issue of the NDP members consistently standing against the good initiatives that we take for the Canadian people. It seems every time we come forward they sit over there, complain and ask for various things. When we come forward with proposals that would actually address those issues, they completely oppose them.

The NDP members need to take a look at themselves as well and decide if they will begin to work with us to govern for Canadians or if they are content to stay with their old ideological bent and continue to oppose virtually everything that is good for Canadians.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to talk about the importance of mining in Canada.

Canada is one of the largest mining nations in the world, with projects across the country. It would not be an exaggeration to add that Canada is probably the world's greatest mining nation, outstripping all our international competitors in depth, extent and expertise of our minerals and metals sector, both domestically and around the world.

Canadian companies are now working in more than 100 countries, in more than 10,000 projects, with mining assets outside of Canada worth more than \$109 billion in capitalization. We produce more

than 60 minerals and metals, with a magnitude of the assets within Canada similar to our assets abroad, with foreign direct investment into Canada accounting for about \$80 billion.

The significance and enormity of these undertakings cannot be overstated. Since the early days of our country, mining has been a cornerstone to Canada's economy. It was and is the lifeblood of rural towns and villages in all provinces and territories, from Thetford Mines and Baie Comeau in Quebec to Kitimat in British Columbia.

On the human scale, more than 308,000 Canadians are employed in mining, exploration and mineral processing, with tens of thousands more men and women working in related industries such as banking, equipment supplies and legal services. It is important to point out that mining is the number one employer of aboriginal people in Canada.

Last year, the mining and mineral processing industries made huge contributions to the Canadian economy. For example, \$2.6 billion was spent in mineral exploration and deposit appraisal, a significant economic stimulus to rural and remote regions of Canada. These industries contributed \$35.1 billion to our gross domestic product and over \$12 billion in capital investment.

Canada has always been a trading nation and one of the main reasons is our abundance of natural resources. We are indeed blessed to have so many commodities in hot demand around the world.

At the international level, the evidence of Canada's importance as a major miner is clear when we take a look at our exports. The total value of Canadian mineral exports was \$84.5 billion, accounting for 21% of Canada's total exports last year. Put another way, the net impact of these exports contributed \$18 billion to our trade surplus.

Here is another impressive financial fact. Half of the world's equity financing for mineral exploration and mineral development was raised in Canadian stock exchanges. Mining companies with headquarters in Canada accounted for more than 39% of worldwide exploration expenditures last year.

We are a leading supplier of important minerals and metals, such as uranium, nickel—

• (1255)

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We are here to talk about asbestos. We are here to talk about how it kills people. We are now 16 minutes into the Conservative member's 20-minute speech and we have not heard the word "asbestos" yet. Would you kindly print the motion and hand it out to all the Conservative members so they will realize that we are here to talk about asbestos that kills Canadians?

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair has dealt with the question of relevance on several occasions this morning. As I have stated repeatedly, hon. members are given significant latitude in terms of addressing a topic to make a presentation they feel is relevant. This is something that all hon. members enjoy in this place.

Is the hon. member for Nickel Belt rising on the same point of order? The member will need to have something specific or I will not allow this point of order.

Mr. Claude Gravelle: Mr. Speaker, you say you are giving members time to get to a relevant subject. I think 16 minutes is enough time for the speakers to speak to the motion. Sixteen minutes out of 20 is enough time. They should start making the subject relevant.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order, please. The Chair has ruled that members will be given latitude to address the motion before the House today. The Chair suggests that if members would like to rise on a point of order, they need something more specific or different than what has already been raised.

The hon. member for Mississauga East—Cooksville.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, the country's economy is a priority for the government. Canada has emerged from the global recession in good shape, but we are still affected by the uncertainties of the world economy. Our recovery remains fragile. Canadians continue to worry about their jobs and the economic future. Let me put into context what these global realities mean for the mining sector and what they mean for the many thousands of Canadian families who depend on mining for their livelihood and income.

The evidence indicates that we ought to see the glass as half full, not half empty. To date, the average prices of most minerals and metals are higher than in 2010. For example, gold increased 23% in 2011, outperforming all other assets including equities, bonds, cash and housing. Looking ahead, the prices of most minerals and metals are expected to remain well above historical levels, in part due to strong demand in China and other emerging economies.

Our government has every intention of continuing to work closely with Canada's mining sector to enhance its competitiveness and environmental responsibility, and to support mining communities. Natural Resources Canada helps these vital business players in the domestic economy with ongoing research and development. The government is also extremely active internationally in its relationship with other countries in an effort to search for new and expanded global markets.

With regard to the subject of today's debate, for over 30 years the Government of Canada has promoted the safe and controlled use of chrysotile. The Government of Canada will not ban a naturally occurring substance. That would put a chill on the entire natural resource industry which is so key to our economic future.

Chrysotile extraction, as with all resource development, is the responsibility of the provinces. This motion is an intrusion on provincial jurisdiction to ban the use of a substance that is traded around the world legally.

Instead, the Government of Canada created the Chrysotile Institute to promote its safe use. Over the years, the Chrysotile

Institute has assisted in the transfer of knowledge and technology to more than 60 foreign countries.

Like other minerals and metals, chrysotile is a naturally occurring substance and supports a viable mining industry in Quebec. Everyone involved in this industry recognizes that the substance can be hazardous, which is why it is strictly managed under controlled conditions through the enforcement of appropriate safety regulations. That safety message has been strongly communicated around the world.

Like other metals and minerals used in industrial applications, chrysotile-based products are used in much needed consumer products.

The exploration and mineral investment climate in Canada is on a positive trend and attracts significant foreign and Canadian investment. As a result of the increasing global demand for minerals and metals driven by emerging economies such as China and India, this trend is expected to continue.

Creating and maintaining an attractive investment environment is essential if we are to continue to take advantage of growing global demand. Having the lowest corporate tax rate in the G7 makes Canada an extremely attractive place to do business.

Our government has worked long and hard on measures to make this positive climate a reality. It is no accident that Canada's mining sector has flourished in this climate. It is also no accident that earlier this month *Forbes* magazine said that Canada is the best place in the world to do business. That is good news for the economy and good news for all Canadians.

• (1300)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member said that this was a provincial matter. I want to clarify that mining is a provincial responsibility but the exportation of asbestos is a federal issue.

Will the hon. member stand and say that he will support banning the exportation of asbestos?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, asbestos is not the only dangerous substance that is produced in this country or any other country for that matter. There are many other substances, minerals and metals that are dangerous to people. Banning the export of these naturally occurring products would hurt no one else but the mining industry and the companies that invest their money in mining.

We have to remember that if we have a substance, whether naturally occurring or man made, that is dangerous to people, we have to make sure that the people who are exposed to it handle it properly, are protected, and that all measures are taken to ensure there is no effect on their health.

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• (1305)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I will ask my hon. colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville a direct question. How can we reconcile the claim that we are very careful and warn people of the health risks of chrysotile asbestos when Canada alone in the world has blocked the listing of asbestos as a hazardous substance under the Rotterdam Convention? Surely, if we want to export it safely, we would welcome the chance to give the countries that are importing this hazardous product the right of prior informed consent under that convention.

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, through the Chrysotile Institute, Canada has been working with countries that produce and use chrysotile effectively to implement and enforce regulations to keep exposure low and utilize control of use practices of chrysotile.

As I mentioned before, chrysotile is not the only dangerous substance. I would remind members that we sell uranium. The safety precautions in handling, transporting and mining the substance are crucial and most important.

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Mississauga East—Cooksville clearly knows what he is talking about because he has a professional background as a mining engineer. He has shared stories with me from time to time about his time in Poland when he was working directly in the mines.

Maybe the member could share with us the advancements that have been made in mining to protect workers and consumers from dangerous products that are used to make everyday goods. Could the member share some of his experiences and tell us how mining has improved in Canada?

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon: Mr. Speaker, mining is a dangerous industry. Miners work in very difficult environments. They are exposed to different substances. Technology has taken a big step forward and miners are protected much better than before. I would also like to mention that some materials that are dangerous to people are not used as commonly as they were before.

When I was young I used to play with little lead figures. Lead is dangerous. The use of lead has decreased over the years to an insignificant level. It has been replaced by other materials. That is the case with other dangerous materials.

Through the advancement of technology and through research and development, we may not use chrysotile down the road. That is the solution we are looking for, but for the time being, it is important for us to protect to the best of our ability the people who do have contact with this substance.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Vancouver Centre.

I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate on the NDP opposition day motion on chrysotile asbestos. We heard from two Conservative members who really had no coherent argument to offer on this subject that I heard, and had some difficulty in following the notes they were ordered to use by the Prime Minister's Office.

On the other hand, the NDP has long opposed asbestos exports. Some members, for instance the member for Winnipeg Centre and the member for Outremont, at times have employed extreme rhetoric. Those members might admit that they are known for that.

However, I believe the focus of today's motion is more reasoned, balanced and logical.

The motion calls for a ban on the use and export of asbestos. This position is supported by the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment and other physicians, scientists and organizations too numerous to list. Why all this opposition, then? Why are all these medical people so strongly and unanimously opposed to the export of asbestos?

With respect to asbestos, the science is clear that it is a danger to human health. The Conservative government will tell us that if used properly, it is safe. However, most of the government's own members know that is not true.

The Canadian Cancer Society says that worldwide more than 100,000 people die every year from occupational exposure to asbestos. Medical colleagues of the member for Simcoe—Grey know the dangers of asbestos. About 250 doctors and health care professionals sent her an open letter indicating that her ethical code of conduct as a physician requires her to influence her Conservative colleagues to change their position on asbestos. I would invite her to indicate that is what she is trying to do. Obviously, if she would do that, I would wish her success in her efforts. That would be quite a challenge for a member of a Conservative Party which last summer threatened to sue Michaela Keyserlingk, a widow whose husband Robert died of mesothelioma in 2009. Imagine this. Conservative Party operatives actually threatened to sue this widow for using the Conservative logo in her campaign against asbestos exports. Imagine the intimidation. What a disgrace. Members on that side of the House would be embarrassed to consider that their own party was threatening to sue a widow in this situation. It is horrendous.

It is shameful when we consider that according to the World Health Organization, about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos in the workplace. Asbestos can come in various forms. We know the history in Canada. We used to hear about it being in ceiling tiles and various materials where it is not even solid and where we knew it was very dangerous. We were told that when it is with a bonding agent, as in concrete for example, it can be more stable for the time being. It can be in floor and ceiling tiles, insulating boards, roofing shingles, water supply lines, plastic filters, pipe covers, and vehicle parts. It can even be used in shipbuilding.

The problem is that when it is sent to a developing country or to a country like India, which is one of the growing powers these days, it can be cut, scraped, filed, sanded, or perhaps removed out of a building. When any of those things are done, workers need to take very careful precautions or they risk having it endanger their health. It can cause cancer. We know that those measures are not taken in many countries. We have a responsibility to act on the knowledge we have.

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The World Health Organization estimates that one in every three deaths from occupational cancer is caused by asbestos. Contrary to the feeble Conservative excuses we have been hearing, the WHO says that all forms of asbestos are carcinogenic to humans and may cause mesothelioma and cancer of the lung, larynx and ovary. Asbestos exposure is also responsible for other diseases, such as asbestosis or fibrosis of the lung, pleural plaque, thickening and effusion.

• (1310)

The organization also calls for the addition of chrysotile asbestos to the list of hazardous chemical products under the Rotterdam convention. The Liberal Party has supported the addition of asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention because we know that scientific evidence has clearly established the health dangers of chrysotile asbestos.

Unfortunately, my colleagues on the government benches do not believe in scientific evidence. To confirm this, all we have to do is look at petitions they have taken on things like the census. Government members did not want the scientific information on that and what the experts were telling us about the importance of the census, the way it had been done before. They do not like it when it comes to their crime bill. They do not want to hear the facts or the evidence on that. They do not even want to listen to their very right-wing conservative friends in places in Texas, who are saying, "We tried that and it does not work".

We see it in their attitude toward climate change. They do not want to listen to the scientists on that. They do not really believe in it. We see it in their attitude when they cut scientists at the Department of Fisheries recently. They are saying that we do not need much science. We are going to have a little of that less often, so we will not worry about whether the fish stocks are good this year as opposed to last year and whether they might change. We will just rely on the fact that we did a test a couple of years ago. That should be good for a while. That is the Conservatives' attitude toward science, so it should not be surprising to any of us that they have this attitude on this subject.

They have proved that attitude many, many times, but they do not like science. They do not trust science for some reason. They like to accept what they are told by the Prime Minister's Office. That much is clear. They proved that again in July of this year when Canada became the only country in the world to object to adding chrysotile asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention.

Adding it to the list would have forced exporters of asbestos to warn recipient countries of any health hazard. It is kind of a basic thing. These countries feel often that they are not well-equipped to handle asbestos safety, like India for example, and those countries could then refuse all imports of the fibre.

Canada is in fact the world's fifth largest exporter of asbestos, and we are also the largest exporter that also imposes severe restrictions on its use domestically. We are okay with exporting it, but we have severe restrictions, very tough rules about how it is handled in Canada. We know it is not enforced elsewhere when it is exported.

We should take a look at the projects, like the one going on next door in the West Block, where asbestos is being removed. There is a

fence around the building, so members of Parliament cannot get in there and be exposed to it. I have not been inside because of that fence, but I trust that people who are working in there have masks and suits, and whatever else is required to ensure that they are not affected by it.

Obviously the big concern is inhaling asbestos into one's lungs, which can cause many of these diseases. That is a hypocritical position for us to be in as a country in view of that. We still export over 90% of the asbestos we produce to other countries, countries like India, knowing full well the proper precautions are not being taken by people who are handling these products.

The Catholic Women's League of Canada recently stated, "Canada is harming people's health by promoting its use and leading diplomatic opposition to the listing of chrysotile asbestos under the Rotterdam Convention".

Canada's stellar reputation will continue to be tarnished until this gross injustice is addressed. We also need to address the domestic situation, and that is why it is important, as the motion suggests, that we deal with the communities that would suffer as a result of closing asbestos mines. We should be concerned about the health and well-being of people living in communities where there is asbestos mining.

I believe the motion strikes a proper balance and I hope that colleagues will support it.

• (1315)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as we are having this debate today, I want to recognize Julius and Martina Hava, who are watching this very closely at home. Julius is basically in his final stages of asbestos-related cancer. Their experience in trying to get medical help for this as soon as possible has been very trying for them and now it is too late.

According to the World Health Organization, it is estimated that about 90,000 people die each year as a result of Canada mining asbestos. Canada is responsible for most of the deaths. Dying from cancer is a very frightening experience for the whole family. This is what Martina writes:

This cancer—caused by asbestos in actually given or I can say forced on people by Canadian government. Carol, my heart is dying knowing that my husband might not even live to be 57 years old, never mind to enjoy retirement age.

I ask my colleague, does he know whether or not the government invests money into research to ensure that this debilitating disease, this killing disease, is funded enough to give treatment to the people? How much is invested by the government? Would he happen to know that?

• (1320)

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate her comments about her friends who are suffering from asbestos. I also appreciate her question about the science. In fact, she may have heard when I asked the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources if the government had research on the health impacts of asbestos. Her question is similar to that.

Business of Supply

I do not have the information on whether or not the government has done studies on this question of how to help people who are suffering from asbestosis and what the best means are, but I would encourage her to ask a Conservative member that question.

I would hope the Conservatives will bring forward and table in the House any independent scientific studies on both of these subjects.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what is obvious in the early stages of this debate, which probably causes concern for anyone watching the debate and certainly anyone who has been following this file, is what the heck the government is thinking with regard to its position on the Rotterdam Convention.

I know that people who smoke make personal decisions. They are very well aware of the risk factors associated with smoking. We identify the risk factors on cartons and packages of cigarettes, but they are willing to accept those risks. However, the government's reluctance to support the Rotterdam Convention in identifying asbestos as a dangerous product befuddles me.

I would like my colleague's comments on what he believes is the reason the government is holding back on this particular issue. Why is it not joining with other nations and identifying this as a difficult material to work with?

Hon. Geoff Regan: Mr. Speaker, we heard the speaker before me talking about the chrysotile mining industry. He said it was worth \$2 billion. I do not think he said per year, but he was talking about large numbers in terms of economic impact, and I suppose that is the basis of the government's approach.

However, for most Canadians it would be very troubling to consider that, with all the scientific evidence we now have, we are the only country in the world that is standing in the way of adding chrysotile asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention's list of hazardous chemical products. That, to me, is alarming and worrying. It is time for the government to consider the scientific evidence, whether it likes science or not, and we know it is not keen on science, to take it seriously and list chrysotile asbestos.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate the mover of the motion from the New Democratic Party and I want to say that we support this fully. We support this because of the scientific evidence that tells us that asbestos is a known carcinogen. The support of the motion speaks not only for the banning of the use and export of asbestos, the listing of it on the Rotterdam Convention. But it also speaks about looking at a plan for the transition of workers out of the asbestos industry and to retrain them to work in other industries as well as to look at new economic development modules or models for miners who are currently mining asbestos currently in Quebec to transition to a new workplace environment and a new job.

I support this because I want to put on the record that there is not a single, reputable, scientific authority in the world that does not agree that asbestos is a carcinogen. There is not a single scientific authority in the world that does not say that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used. When people say that chrysotile is different, all of the evidence and science around the world is telling us that it is not.

One of the things that has to concern us and the reason that we in Canada put asbestos in our own Hazardous Products Act is because

we know that it is dangerous. We know that it causes health effects. We heard from my colleague that it causes three known health effects right now, one of which is asbestosis which is a chronic disease of the lung. People cannot use their lung tissue to breathe, so it is a chronic obstructive lung disease as a result of that.

The second one is mesothelioma which is a very rare cancer that affects the chest and abdominal cavity, and is linked only to asbestos.

The third is lung cancer that is linked to asbestos.

Here are three known health hazards that not only cause chronic illness but also causes death. Between 90,000 to 100,000 people will die this year from asbestos-related disease, and 125 million people around the world, especially in developing countries and poorer countries, are subject to asbestos inhalation diseases. The government continues to fund this product and continues to put money into assisting with the mining of this product.

If we want to make good public policy it must be based on evidence and it must be based on the impact on human health. We have seen the evidence very clearly on this issue. There are strict restrictions in Canada. We know that the United States also has absolute restrictions on the use of asbestos. In 50 European countries, in fact the whole European Union no longer use asbestos and have a ban on it.

Going back to 1983, Iceland banned all types of asbestos, moving on with all of the Scandinavian countries into Hungary in 1988, Italy in 1992, and Germany in 1993. The list goes on. Even Brazil, which produces asbestos, is now saying that it is a carcinogen. We know all of this, that is the first thing. Let us deal with asbestos here at home. Let us move out of mining and let us help the workers with transition. Let us build new economic development modules within the area so that people can find work.

However, that is here at home. When we know that and we have asbestos under the Hazardous Products Act in our own country, as a physician I believe it is unethical for us to export this to other countries, especially countries that do not have good public health agencies and do not have good public health regulations. It is also unethical to ban its inclusion in the Rotterdam Convention that basically tells people around the world that this is a dangerous substance and directs them how to use it in as safe as possible a manner.

●(1325)

That is what is unethical about this: one, we do not think it is healthy here; two, we export it to other people while blocking information, knowledge and any kind of regulations on the fact that we want other people to know this is a hazardous product and that it can kill them or damage their health through chronic lung disease. That is the unethical part of it for me.

Business of Supply

The Quebec Workers' Compensation Board's statistics in 2009 said that 60% of all workplace-related deaths came from asbestos-related diseases. That is a strong statement. We also know that the Canadian Medical Association recently asked the government to ban it, to stop mining it, to stop exporting it and to put it in the Hazardous Products Act and the Rotterdam Convention as a minimum reasonable attitude toward it.

We know that the Rideau Institute asked the government to stop producing and exporting this lethal product. The Catholic Women's League, we have heard, also told the government to stop, so this does not come only from medical bodies or public health associations. All 16 public health offices in Quebec are calling for this action—all of them. The Quebec Public Health Association and the Canadian Public Health Association are calling for it. Health groups and non-governmental bodies that care about the health of people are calling for it. Of course, there was an open letter to one of the government members across the way, who is a physician, asking for that particular member to speak out and to have some sort of ethical attitude about the use of this product by her government.

We know that asbestos is everywhere. Many countries of the world use it for putting tanks on their rooftops to store water and mix it with cement to use it in floor tiles, roof tiles and walls. We know the minute these products are rubbed, the fibres of asbestos go into the air and into people's lungs. It cannot be stopped from getting into the air or people's lungs. There is no way we can stop asbestos from getting out of the format it is in. In the beginning it is in a format that is supposed to keep the fibres intact, but with wear and tear the fibres immediately go into the air and people are chronically exposed to it.

My colleague just shouted at me to imagine an earthquake. India and other countries that are using asbestos as insulation and for making buildings and laying tiles, et cetera, have had earthquakes. It is a double hazard, and it is something that we should no longer, as an ethical country, be exposing people to.

I will end with a quote from the Rideau Institute. It stated:

It is with sorrow and shame that we note that Canada is becoming a pariah on the international stage for its obstruction of global efforts to protect health, human rights and the environment.

Mr. Speaker, I cannot top that one. I think it is time we became an ethical nation again.

• (1330)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my hon. colleague. I worked in the removal of asbestos from buildings in downtown Toronto. I remember one day an entire site was shut down because a young woman who was hired was using a vacuum. She was not even in the asbestos zone, but when workers saw she did not have a mask, they shut the entire work site down because of the immediate threat to her health from just being on the floor without a mask.

The science exists. We know the devastating effects of asbestos, yet we also know that it is being imported into third world countries and put into cement mixers and being cut as tiles. There is no protection for workers. It seems to me that the government has made a decision that it is okay, in the interest of a few jobs, for people to be murdered in the third world because they somehow do not count as much as Canadian workers.

I would like to ask the member about our being an ethical nation and what it says about Canada on the world stage when, in order to maintain an industry that should have died long ago, we knowingly dump this level of carcinogen into third world countries without the protection that workers need.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, we have heard from many groups, including the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Public Health Agency and the Rideau Institute, all of which, for that very reason, are calling for Canada to have asbestos placed in annex III of the Rotterdam Convention at the very least.

Children are exposed to it. If people have been using asbestos in a building site, it is in the earth and children are playing with it. It is not very ethical, as the member said.

I travelled the world as a minister for the Canadian government, and Canada used to be looked up to as a nation of ethics, fairness and caring about others. We have to think about this. I do not understand how the government could continue to block putting this substance into the Rotterdam Convention.

• (1335)

Mr. Brad Butt (Mississauga—Streetsville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened quite carefully to the member's statements. She did acknowledge that she has had the opportunity to sit around the cabinet table and discuss issues like this.

My question is this: when did the epiphany happen among the members of the third party over there? When did they suddenly decide they were going to be outspoken critics on this issue? They were in government for 16 years and did zero, so when did the epiphany happen?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, in the last five or six years many countries have come to look at class actions suits on this issue, based on what every scientific piece of evidence is now showing us.

There was a time when everyone thought that chrysotile asbestos was safe. That has changed in the last few years. We may not have known about that evidence at the time, but now the evidence is clear, and there is no excuse for the government not to do the right thing. There is absolutely no excuse. It has been here for six years.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned, Julius Hava and his wife are actually watching this on TV right now. He does not have much time left, unfortunately.

He wants to reiterate the fact that he was a federal government energy, mines and resources department worker and also worked in the mineral exploration industry. He is now unable to work, and this afternoon he is watching this debate.

Business of Supply

He could have tried to have treatment right away, at a cost of \$400,000 in the United States. My colleague mentioned that medical assistance is not available in third world countries; well, it is not available here either. There are only trials.

I am just wondering if the member could advise us why her government, when it was in government, did not do anything about it? Will the member be supporting this motion today?

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, the motion says very little about medical treatment and accessibility to medical care, but of course this is an absolute essential. If people become ill from a public health hazard, then under medicare they should be treated when they get sick. That is a given. If that treatment is denied by provincial governments, then one needs to look at it under the Canada Health Act. That is a given.

However, it is not in this motion.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take a few moments at the beginning of my speech to provide a history of the fight by asbestos workers. There are many key moments in this struggle. I think that we need to provide asbestos workers with immediate and proportionate help for all that they have done for this country for decades and for all the suffering that they have endured for close to 30 years now.

Why can the struggle of asbestos workers not be ignored? Let us go back to the very beginning. In the 19th century, a deposit of asbestos was discovered in the Asbestos region. For over half a century, people in the region worked under simply appalling conditions: even minimum workplace safety standards were not met and accidents occurred almost daily. Occupational health would have been more aptly described as occupational illness. People were sick on a regular basis.

Three other NDP members and I had a full day meeting with people from Asbestos at the end of the summer. Workers who are 50 or 60 years old told us about how, when they were young, they took their fathers lunch at the factory. When they opened the door, they could not recognize the fathers and mothers who worked there. They saw only shadows in a sort of opaque dust. They had to call out to their fathers, “Dad, it's me. I brought your lunch.” Their fathers would appear to be a sort of shadow in a big cloud of dust inside the asbestos mine. These are the types of conditions that people experienced until 1949.

In 1949, there was an event known as the Asbestos strike. That was the key point in this whole story. For eight months, the workers in Asbestos battled with law enforcement, and the other asbestos miners across Quebec quickly joined in. The Duplessis government was in power during this period, which was referred to in Quebec as the great darkness. Our kindly premier at the time considered any action taken by the workers to be the work of big bad socialism, even though the workers were getting together to demand something as fundamental as the right to not die at work. Our good friend and premier at the time saw this as big bad socialism. The battle was difficult and cruel.

One important thing happened during that time. For the first time, because these people were so destitute and in so much pain, the clergy did not take the side of the government of the day, which was unthinkable at the time in Quebec. A large number of the clergy sided with the workers. This is what led historians to claim that the strike was one of the first steps towards the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, if not the very event that instigated the Quiet Revolution in Quebec.

Gérard Picard, president of the Confédération des travailleurs catholiques du Canada, was my mother's favourite uncle. During my childhood, he would often recount the entire battle. Mr. Picard, my great-uncle, was regularly arrested by law enforcement officials for no reason, for example, because his left turn signal was not on for a full eight seconds. This harassment went on for over a decade. It was a very long battle for such simple demands as working without dying of lung disease.

Canada is also indebted to the asbestos workers. Everyone here knows the Right Hon. Pierre Elliot Trudeau. Asbestos has traditionally been associated with the start of his political involvement. He and others, like the Hon. Jean Marchand, went on to have long careers in federal politics. They are the ones who worked with Lester B. Pearson, in what was probably the Liberal government most influenced by social democratic values at the time. For example, they are the ones who proposed the first plans for universal access to health care, student loans and the Canada pension plan. The battle fought by the asbestos workers is in part responsible for helping to instigate these fundamental changes in Canada. Quebecers and Canadians must recognize the historic importance of the battle fought by the asbestos workers.

• (1340)

International consensus on the harmful effects of asbestos on public health is motivating the NDP to take a courageous political position and to call for the ban of the use and export of asbestos. We cannot forget that this international consensus means collapsed markets and unemployment and despair among hundreds of workers. These people have fought to modernize Quebec and Canada as few other groups of workers have. They deserve our complete solidarity, and they deserve it now.

I will quickly go over the different points of the NDP motion, which calls for stopping the export of asbestos and also assisting affected workers as soon as possible.

First, the government must “ban the use and export of asbestos”. Internationally, the World Health Organization says that more than 107,000 people a year die from an asbestos-related cancer. The International Social Security Association—I have its report right here and we can see that it is rather lengthy—is calling for an outright ban on asbestos. In the United States, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration has found that asbestos causes a number of different types of cancer. In Canada, since 2006, Health Canada has said that we cannot say that chrysotile asbestos is safe and we must choose to add it to the list of regulated substances. The Association des pneumologues de la province de Québec also favours banning asbestos mining.

Business of Supply

The thing that is important about this part of the motion is that the main buyers of Canadian asbestos are Indonesia, India and the Philippines. We had discussions with the asbestos people and I asked a question that I felt got at the heart of the problem: can we guarantee that the young construction worker in the Philippines or in Indonesia who, in 10, 15 or 20 years will be asked to tear off the shingles from hundreds of roofs, will remove shingles containing asbestos in accordance with the necessary labour standards, in other words, wearing a mask and gloves, removing one shingle at a time and disposing of it in a self-closing container? It is impossible. Even those who support the use of asbestos could not guarantee that in 5, 10, 15 or 20 years, we will not be poisoning a young worker in Indonesia. No one could reassure me on this. That is the crux of the problem. We can no longer bury our heads in the sand.

Second, the motion calls on the government to, "support international efforts to add chrysotile asbestos to the list of hazardous chemical products." This is the third time this government has spoiled international efforts to include chrysotile asbestos on the UN's list of hazardous materials. This is serious. It means that part of our Canadian diplomacy, which had such a good reputation in the 1970s and 1980s, until 1990, is currently supporting something that the entire international community condemns. Nearly everyone has been calling for a ban on asbestos. At the very least, it should be included on the list in order to send a clear message everywhere, from Korea to Indonesia, that it is a dangerous product. The government is involving Canada's diplomats in all kinds of processes to prevent that.

Third, the motion calls on the government to, "assist affected workers by developing a Just Transition Plan". The workers' co-op in Asbestos, among others, has a long tradition of organization and job creation. It is such a key stakeholder in the economy there that it even owns shares in the mine. Imagine if funding like that given to the Chrysotile Institute—about \$2.3 million over 10 years—were given to those people to create jobs.

Finally, the last point, which is very important to me, calls on the government to, "support communities and municipalities in asbestos producing regions through an investment fund for regional economic diversification". Over the past 35 years or so, nearly \$50 million in Canadian and Quebec public funds has been invested in supporting asbestos. That equals \$1.4 million a year. If we were to invest \$1.4 million in organizations like the local CFDC, we would be talking about a lot more than 300 short-term jobs for three or four months of the year. That would be the smarter choice.

• (1345)

Above all, the motion before us aims to put an end to the contempt being shown towards the people who work in the asbestos industry. I invite everyone to vote in favour of the motion, in order to immediately break the stalemate facing asbestos workers. Collectively, we owe it to them to lend our support as quickly as possible.

[English]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I cannot help but ask the member opposite why his party, which says that it stands for workers, will not stand with chrysotile workers in Quebec?

We know that the union that encompasses this industry does not support what the motion calls for. We also know that the motion goes even further than the people who are asking for the listing of chrysotile on the Rotterdam Convention.

That is the interesting point because I have in my hand a record of a vote from the National Assembly of Québec that shows that the member for Outremont voted against the inclusion of this on the Rotterdam Convention.

Could the member tell us if the member for Outremont, who is running for the leadership of the party, has changed his view, and could the member please tell us that the member for Outremont continues to support the workers of Quebec, or will he undermine them, as the motion calls for?

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the member one thing. My colleague from Outremont participated by telephone when we met with workers. His position is clear and straightforward: we must stop exporting asbestos. The scientific evidence gathered for years inescapably points to this conclusion. I have told the story of my great uncle and so I am the first to say that this is a sad, but inescapable conclusion. We must acknowledge the situation, as developed countries have, especially because we must quickly help workers in the asbestos industry with funding to meet their needs.

• (1350)

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his excellent speech. I would like to add another aspect to this debate about asbestos: the issue of the environmental impact in Quebec. I know that, in recent years, it has come to light that asbestos has polluted the environment in Quebec.

[English]

In fact, the ambient pollution by asbestos in waterways and in the regions of Asbestos, Quebec, and its surroundings have led to the highest level of women with asbestos-related cancer documented anywhere in the world.

I wonder if he has any comments on that aspect.

[Translation]

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, it is inescapable. Unfortunately, in the past 100 years and even recently, a significant number of workers have been victims of the market collapse. In Asbestos alone, 1,000 jobs have been lost in a small community of approximately 6,000 people. That would be equivalent to 900,000 people losing their jobs and having difficulty finding work in Toronto for 10 years. If Toronto had such a problem, there would have been a plan in place long ago to address it. The asbestos workers are suffering financially, and the member unfortunately is correct in saying that they are also the front-line victims of asbestos-related illnesses. I can therefore only concur with my colleague's comments.

Business of Supply

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments. It is ironic and strange to see the Conservatives expressing so much hope for a better union in this case. I very clearly recall the courage and leadership shown by the hon. member for Outremont and the other NDP member from Quebec on this matter. The Conservatives are playing nasty political games when they say that workers and people in general must die in order to boost Quebecer's confidence in them. It is a question of morals and ethics. I wonder if my colleague could comment on that.

Mr. François Lapointe: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for raising this particular issue. I do not have sufficient evidence to prove this, but I cannot help wondering: is the government's decision to support the industry proof that it has decided not to help these people? To hide behind the idea that there might be a recovery, despite the growing evidence that that industry has collapsed for good, is that not, in fact, just an excuse for not proposing an investment plan to help those people? I cannot help but wonder about this. It is up to the government to respond immediately.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, like my colleagues who have just spoken brilliantly on the subject, I would also like to speak in favour of the motion.

The NDP is a party that cares about the health and welfare of Canadians, and the present use and export of Canadian chrysotile asbestos runs directly counter to the health of our population. In addition, asbestos endangers the lives of the workers who are dangerously exposed to it in developing countries. To rectify this alarming situation, our party urges concrete measures such as are proposed by the NDP in the motion today.

First, it is important, and this must be the priority, to ban the use of this dangerous substance that leads to the development of fatal illnesses. It is important to know that all forms of asbestos disintegrate into finer and finer fibres that are invisible to the naked eye. When these fibres are inhaled by a human being, they can cause many fatal illnesses such as asbestosis and lung cancer. And there are facts to prove the extremely dangerous nature of this product.

In this country, more Canadians die because of asbestos than all other occupational and industrial causes combined, while in Quebec, where the mines are mainly located, asbestos is responsible for half of all work-related deaths.

Another concrete example is found in a study done in 2009. The study concluded that the concentration of asbestos in the outside air in Thetford Mines, Quebec, is 215 times higher than samples taken in the United States and elsewhere in Canada. The death rate associated with lung cancer and mesothelioma is 17 times higher there than in the general population.

Experts from various fields have also spoken out on the question of the toxicity of chrysotile asbestos, but the government does not seem to be interested in hearing them, let alone in acknowledging their expertise. Internal Health Canada documents show that, back in 2006, officials refuted the Conservatives' assertion that chrysotile asbestos was safe but the Conservatives preferred to close their eyes.

The Confederation of National Trade Unions, or CSN, has supported ending asbestos mining in the province, but the Conservative government has not heard it.

At the international level, the World Health Organization and the International Labour Organization agree that there is no safe level of exposure to asbestos. But the Conservative government continues to outrageously tarnish our international reputation, a reputation we have worked so hard to build in recent decades.

Asbestos is a hazardous material, and asbestos mining has decreased significantly since the late 1990s. This sector is just not profitable any more, and an economic transition plan similar to the one for the tobacco industry is urgently needed. In 1991, Quebec asbestos mines employed 1,000 workers. Today, only 350 people work three to four months per year in Thetford Mines. LAB Chrysotile Inc. has entered bankruptcy protection and plans on closing its doors next November.

Instead of reviewing the dangers inherent in this economic sector and supporting miners' families, the government has chosen the criminal approach of subsidizing 160 trade delegations to 60 countries to promote asbestos exports abroad.

Using taxpayers' money these delegations have promoted our supposedly safe asbestos in order to score big sales, primarily in developing countries that do not have the safe handling practices that we have in Canada.

In terms of our miners' health costs, a study of disability claims for 691 workers suffering from asbestos-related illnesses indicates that these costs topped \$66 million in 2000 alone.

Canada cannot afford to gamble with workers' health or taxpayers' money, money that the government continues to misallocate. The NDP has been asking for a ban on asbestos exports for a long time because asbestos is causing serious illnesses and death in developing countries.

In Canada, the use of asbestos is now strictly regulated under the Hazardous Products Act.

•(1355)

That is not the case in a number of developing countries where legislation on hazardous products has not yet come into effect or where the regulatory bodies do not yet have the resources to deal with lawbreakers.

It is estimated that asbestos causes more than 100,000 deaths a year worldwide. Workers in the developing countries to which Canada exports its asbestos are not usually aware of the safety measures for handling asbestos and they do not receive any training in that regard, either.

Statements by Members

Indonesia, India and the Philippines are currently the main buyers of our asbestos and we all know that their workers do not have basic health and safety protection. While asbestos is banned in more than 50 countries, including the most developed countries, Canada continues to export its asbestos without warning labels about its toxicity. Worse yet, the government has even tried to dissuade Thailand and North Korea from issuing a toxicity warning on the bags of asbestos they receive. The government considered that these warning measures, which would show a skull and crossbones, were excessive.

The NDP believes we should support international efforts in favour of adding chrysotile asbestos to the list of hazardous chemical products under the Rotterdam Convention. Since 2006, the government has obstructed international efforts to add asbestos to the United Nations' list of hazardous products three times so far. We absolutely must rectify this situation that embarrasses and shames us in the eyes of the international community.

• (1400)

[English]

Mr. Barry Devolin: Order, please. I must interrupt at this time. The hon. member will have three minutes remaining when the House returns to this matter.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Cornelius Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honour Deohaeko, a group of families committed to promoting the social inclusion and valued participation of people with disabilities.

In 1994, they designed and built Rougemont Co-operative in my riding, home of over 200 people of widely diverse backgrounds, including adults with intellectual disabilities. In the co-op, Deohaeko has created an environment recognized internationally for helping adults with an intellectual disability, often stigmatized and treated as a burden, to become resilient and resourceful for themselves and make a significant contribution to their communities.

I thank the Deohaeko Support Network for the pioneering work it has done to improve people's lives. It has created a model for people with intellectual disabilities to lead a better life in their community.

* * *

[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMY

Ms. Lise St-Denis (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in the world of pulp and paper, the Laurentide mill in Grand-Mère plans on halting production on its No. 10 machine, which will directly or indirectly affect hundreds of jobs.

Entire chunks of our heritage are disappearing because of the world paper crisis. We must use some imagination to put our regions back to work, and we are still waiting for the government to take concrete action to do so. It is easy for the current government to

make our public institutions disappear, one by one, under the cover of budget cuts, but it must propose a coherent vision of what our regional economies will look like in the future.

* * *

[English]

JUNIOR FOOTBALL

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Saskatoon Hilltops have done it again. In what is turning into a bit of rivalry, both on the field and, dare I say, on this side of the House, the Saskatoon Hilltops has once again defeated the Vancouver Island Raiders this past Saturday in the Canadian Junior Football League semi-final.

Last year, I had the pleasure of hosting my colleague, the member for Nanaimo—Alberni, in Saskatoon where my colleagues and I won a friendly bet on the outcome of the 2010 Canadian bowl final.

I congratulate the Saskatoon Hilltops and wish them all the best as they take on the Hamilton Hurricanes this coming Saturday where they will defend their Canadian Junior Football League championship title.

* * *

GROUND OBSERVER CORPS WINGS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize James Hodder, formerly of St. Bernard's and now St. Lawrence in my riding of Random—Burin—St. George's.

As a postmaster and telegraph operator in the 1950s, Mr. Hodder volunteered as a chief observer with the Royal Canadian Air Force Ground Observer Corps. In 1957, after three years of outstanding service identifying and documenting all low flying planes, he was awarded the Ground Observer Corps Wings.

Unfortunately, those wings commemorating his patriotic service to his country, were lost. Mr. Hodder's wife, Nella, of 43 years, knew he was distraught over the loss. Not knowing exactly where to turn, Mrs. Hodder started making inquiries and called my office wondering how she could secure another set of wings for her husband.

On September 1, along with acting wing commander, Major Luc Girouard, and Chief Warrant Officer, Joe Burns, I had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Hodder presented with another set of wings.

An appreciative Mr. Hodder declared, "This is a wonderful day, a very good day, I will never forget this".

Today, I ask all members of the House to join me in telling Mr. Hodder that we will never forget him and the service that he and other veterans give and continue to give to our country.

*Statements by Members***MEDAL OF BRAVERY**

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was my pleasure, this past Friday, October 28, to attend a ceremony at Rideau Hall where constituents Matt Jackson and Tyler Lockerby were bestowed the medal of bravery by His Excellency, the Governor General of Canada.

In June 2009, Matt and Tyler risked their lives to rescue four people from a submerged vehicle near Revelstoke, British Columbia. They witnessed the van in front of them swerve out of control, roll down an embankment and plunge into Griffen Lake. Jumping into the frigid waters, Matt dove under and pulled three victims out through the driver's side window, passing them to Tyler, who brought them to shore. With the fourth person still strapped inside the rapidly sinking vehicle, Matt and Tyler made their way back and managed to pull the last victim out through the broken window.

Thanks to the quick and brave actions of Mr. Jackson and Mr. Lockerby, all four victims survived.

On behalf of the constituents of Kelowna—Lake Country, it is my great pleasure to congratulate Matt and Tyler and to thank them for their courage and bravery. We are so fortunate to have these heroes as members of our community and our great country.

* * *

• (1405)

ROUGE PARK, ONTARIO

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend, I was pleased to participate in the biodiversity walk in Rouge Park, as well as the opening of the new viewing platform overlooking the majestic park and Little Rouge Creek.

Rouge Park, located in the northeastern part of my constituency, is one of Canada's urban gems. Volunteers provide guided nature walks year-round for all interested. These very educational and interesting walks teach participants about the biodiversity in Rouge Park and the efforts that this park is taking to combat climate change. They are a great way to learn more about the flora and fauna of our area, as well as a great way to spend time with family, friends and loved ones in our great outdoors. I would like to thank the volunteers who conduct these walks.

People from across all party lines and at all levels of government support the naming of Rouge Park as Canada's first urban national park. I am happy to be working with my colleagues and community members to see this dream come true.

I encourage my fellow members of Parliament to support Rouge Park and everyone in the area to come out and participate in one of Rouge Park's biodiversity walks.

* * *

DIWALI MILAN CELEBRATION

Mr. Wladyslaw Lizon (Mississauga East—Cooksville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday, I had the pleasure of attending the 2011 Diwali Milan celebrations organized by the Rajasthan Association of North America—Canada, a non-profit organization with a mission of preserving and promoting Rajasthan culture, values, heritage and

traditions from within Canada and educating current and future generations about their motherland, while enjoying the crisp freedoms that life in Canada allows them.

Part of the celebration was the awards ceremony where outstanding individuals were recognized for their achievements, hard work and dedication in promoting the culture, values and heritage of Rajasthan.

I take this opportunity to thank the president of RANA Canada, Mr. Yogesh Sharma, and his team for the tireless work, dedication and leadership. I also congratulate the honourable recipients of individual awards: Prerna Khandelwal, Mahendra Bhandari, Ashok Khandelwal, Ekta Mantri and Shalini Vyas, and Rana Business Excellence Award recipient Globeways Canada Inc.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Bev Shipley (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, summer has come to an end, fall harvest is under way and, before winter sets in, another hunting season in Lambton—Kent—Middlesex is upon us. It is a time when rural and urban hunters in my area get together to replenish the freezer of many people: family, friends and those who struggle to make ends meet.

Bringing an end to the long gun registry is yet another step our Conservative government is taking toward a Canada that protects the innocent, lives by the rule of law, encourages personal responsibility and respects the rights of Canadians, whether they live in the city or the country.

Legislation has been launched and another promise to Canadians will be kept. Long gone will be the long gun registry.

* * *

[*Translation*]

YVON BOIVIN

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I would like to recognize Yvon Boivin's exceptional commitment to the people of Trois-Rivières and his involvement in the community.

In my riding and other neighbouring ridings, over 850 families are seeing their life savings disappear as a result of the discovery of pyrrhotite in the concrete foundations of their homes.

Instead of merely seeking to solve his own problem, Mr. Boivin chose to act as a leader and to counsel and defend the many victims of pyrrhotite by chairing the Coalition Proprio-Béton.

For the victims, the consequences are just as devastating as those of the flooding in Montérégie, for example. However, the time it will take to get back to normal is much longer and there are far fewer support measures in place.

I would therefore like to commend Mr. Boivin for his civic engagement and assure him of my ongoing support in obtaining a fair and equitable solution from the Government of Canada.

• (1410)

[English]

ANN SOUTHAM

Mrs. Stella Ambler (Mississauga South, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the finest human qualities is generosity. The late Ann Southam, who died in November 2010, knew that.

Ann Southam, a celebrated music composer and Order of Canada recipient, left a generous endowment of \$14 million to the Canadian Women's Foundation, the largest single donation a community-based Canadian women's organization has ever received from any individual. Her gift will fuel the foundation's important work of investing in programs that move women and girls out of violence and poverty and into confidence and success.

By supporting the Canadian Women's Foundation, Ann Southam's legacy of generosity will empower countless women and girls across Canada.

I encourage Canadians to celebrate the generosity and vision of Ann Southam today.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the government's abuse of its power and the dangerous path it is taking the country down.

In Bill C-19, Ending the Long-gun Registry Act, we see the Conservatives giving in to their worst instincts in proposing to destroy all the data. Their solution to a registry that cost too much to establish in the first place is to commit to spending millions more to wipe out the records from that same registry, untold millions more.

The government was not given a mandate in the last election to have a bonfire of the vanities, in fact two bonfires, one for the data and another one for the \$2 billion that has already been spent.

From shutting down debate at the Wheat Board to building prisons for crimes the government cannot find, the 60% of Canadians who opposed the government are proving right that we need electoral reform in the country finally to have it truly represented in the government of the day. If ever a government has made that case, it is the government.

If the provinces and the police want the data, why will the government not simply give it to them?

* * *

[Translation]

WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, October is Women's History Month in Canada. This year's theme is "Women in Canadian Military Forces: A Proud Legacy".

[English]

It highlights the important contributions of women to the Canadian military forces throughout Canada's history. It is an ideal time to learn about their stories, celebrate their achievements and be inspired by their courage and perseverance.

Statements by Members

Women such as Shirley Robinson, who served with distinction in the Canadian military, dedicating herself to removing gender-based barriers, and Susan Wigg, who was one of the first women to attend Royal Military College, should be acknowledged for their hard work. Both of these outstanding women have been recognized for addressing gender-based issues and for helping make the Canadian Forces more inclusive.

[Translation]

Canadian men and women should be inspired by their example and the example of other women who help defend freedom, democracy and human rights.

* * *

[English]

BRAIN TUMOUR AWARENESS MONTH

Mr. Justin Trudeau: Mr. Speaker, today is the last day of Brain Tumour Awareness Month in Canada. This may come as a surprise to some of my colleagues in the House.

[Translation]

For too many Canadians—more than 50,000 of them—their brain tumour diagnosis also came as a surprise.

[English]

As we have all experienced through family and friends, and even through some of our colleagues here, cancer does not discriminate and can strike quickly.

Thousands today do not even know yet that they have this increasingly common, through often hard to detect, form of cancer.

[Translation]

New technologies and treatments mean that, these days, this disease is less often fatal. But with improvements to come, we can make that a guarantee.

[English]

An increasing number of survivors are also coping better and living more normal lives. They walk these halls and pass us on the street. They are not simply enduring their struggle, they are thriving and winning.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to be able to both celebrate them and increase awareness by highlighting Brain Tumour Awareness Month.

* * *

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, 93 years ago, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, the guns of the First World War fell silent. On November 11, our nation will pause to remember the generations of Canadians who have bravely served our country and we will honour those who continue to serve today.

Oral Questions

With the First World War Centennial approaching, let us take a moment to remember some of the historic milestones that contributed to our proud military heritage and helped shape our country: the Battle of Passchendaele, the Battle of the Somme, the Battle of Beaumont Hamel and the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Throughout these battles, regiments from across the country fought together to forge a new and stronger sense of Canadian identity.

This important chapter in our history must not be lost and we should all encourage young Canadians to take an active role in remembrance by taking an active role ourselves.

Lest we forget.

* * *

• (1415)

ASBESTOS

Mr. Joe Comartin (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite years of opposition to the government's policy on asbestos from average Canadians, scientists and the worldwide community, we now see that division is beginning to appear in the government's own benches on this important file. The member for Sarnia—Lambton told the media, "I'm definitely not supporting the mining or exporting of asbestos".

We know there are more. We know there is growing opposition among Conservative MPs on just how out of touch the government position on asbestos really is.

However, there is a chance for Conservative MPs to stand in the House, to stand with Canadians, to stand with the worldwide community and to stand up for a just transition. All that is needed is for the Prime Minister's office to allow Conservative MPs who agree with New Democrats on asbestos to stand in their place and vote to turn the page on asbestos:

It will be a great day for Canada's reputation on the world stage, a great day for health and safety of workers and a great day for democracy.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the IMF's annual review of Canada supports the government's plan to return to balanced budgets in the medium term.

As the Minister of Finance said:

Thanks to our sound and stable economy and measures taken in the Next Phase of Canada's Economic Action Plan, the IMF is maintaining its positive outlook for Canada.

The IMF statement endorses the measures taken by the government to promote the long-term stability of Canada's housing market, including changes in the rules for government-backed insured mortgages.

The statement confirms our financial sector is solid, noting the government's "high prudential standards and rigorous supervision". The statement recognizes substantial progress in advancing international and domestic financial sector reforms.

The IMF welcomes our intention to launch a Canadian securities regulator.

Although GDP is up for August, the global economy is still fragile. That is why our government is implementing our low tax plan to create jobs and economic growth. Our plan is working.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

THE ECONOMY

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the latest GDP numbers show a stagnation of the economy with one exception, the oil and gas sector, thanks to the Conservatives' favouritism. However, high productivity sectors like manufacturing and infrastructure were flat or down.

Is this not further evidence that we should prolong the stimulus package and target high productivity sectors?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government's position is that we should keep going down the path that we are on because it is working. The IMF says so. The World Bank says so. Today StatsCan again says so. What we are doing is working.

Since the worst part of the recession in July 2009, the Canadian economy has produced over 650,000 jobs, more than 80% of which are full-time jobs. We are getting the job done for Canadians and that is why they have entrusted our government to continue focusing on the economy.

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not only are Conservatives refusing to act to help our economy, they are also turning off the taps of the previous stimulus package.

The city of Hamilton stands to lose \$7.8 million in infrastructure funding today. There is no reason for the government not to invest the money that was budgeted for infrastructure.

Why not ensure that every penny allocated to stimulate the economy will actually go to stimulate the economy?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would simply point out for the Leader of the Opposition that our economic action plan has indeed worked. The Auditor General took a look at our economic action plan, the way in which we were investing our funds and said that we did it prudently and responsibly. It is true that the stimulus spending has ended and that the stimulus spending had the positive effects that we intended.

Now we are moving to the next chapter of our economic action plan, which is drive to a balanced budget, while putting in place policies that drive up economic growth and create jobs for Canadians. It is what we promised to do. It is what we are going to do.

• (1420)

Mrs. Nycole Turmel (Leader of the Opposition, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this does not help the economy.

Oral Questions

[*Translation*]

The GDP numbers should wake the Conservatives up. The economy needs further stimulus, not an abrupt end to the money already promised.

In Saint-Eustache, for instance, work was delayed because of federal red tape. The city is not to blame, but the Conservatives are using that as an excuse to cut funding for the bridge to îles Corbeil.

Instead of cutting off the stimulus funding, why not prolong or even expand the program?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we already extended our process in order to allow that project to be completed. We created a responsible, effective process for the entire economy, and we worked on that process with the municipalities and the provinces.

Let us be clear, however: our process, our program, our economic action plan and our plan to deal with this crisis are all working. We are creating jobs. Our economic system is improving. Our work is not done yet. Our work will be done when all Canadians can find the jobs they need, and we will continue on the same path with next year's budget.

* * *

[*English*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government pretends to support victims, but now it is moving to scrap years worth of gun registry records. Victims of tragedies like the shooting at l'École Polytechnique want these records kept. Police chiefs want them. Provinces want them. However, the government refuses to listen.

The government is planning a \$2 billion bonfire. Why is it ignoring the pleas of victims and their families? Why will it not put public safety first?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting that this question is coming from a member who has voted against every public initiative that actually protects victims.

Perhaps there is something that she should know. Just because the Liberals spent \$2 billion on a long gun registry does not mean it is worth anything. In fact, the only thing it does is target law-abiding Canadian citizens improperly and is obtrusive in their private affairs.

Let us make it very clear. Our government will focus on issues that deal with victims.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, if the government were to introduce bills that made sense and were supported by a majority of Canadians, we would be happy to support them. Every day, more voices are joining the outcry in Quebec and calling for the government to keep the data from the firearms registry. The National Assembly, police chiefs, families of victims of murder and suicide, groups advocating for abused women and, more recently, a large construction union, the FTQ, have all said that the data on file must be preserved.

Why is the government going to spend money on destroying useful information instead of spending money on enhancing police protection—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Public Safety.

[*English*]

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Police Association has said that it is quite satisfied with the efforts this government has made to work on behalf of front-line police officers, especially with respect to the comprehensive justice legislation, Bill C-10, which the member opposes. If she wants anything else, perhaps she could speak to her colleague from Sackville-Eastern Shore who said that the registry itself gives people a false sense of security over gun control and gun safety. He is in favour of getting rid of it. Why is she not?

* * *

GOVERNMENT PROCUREMENT

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the Minister of Public Works and Government Services. I wonder if the minister can tell us whether she considers the work of the fairness officer in assessing the value of the contract with respect to the building of ships was an important and integral part of that entire process.

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, where it is necessary and we think it is valuable, we employ fairness monitors to be a part of procurement. In this situation, with the shipbuilding procurement strategy, it was invaluable.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, since the Minister of Public Works and Government Services feels that it was invaluable, I wonder if I could ask her colleague, the Minister of National Defence, why a similar process would not be followed with respect to the F-35s.

The prime minister of Holland, the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

• (1425)

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Toronto Centre has the floor. Members should hold off on their comments.

Hon. Bob Rae: Mr. Speaker, while the government figures out who is going to answer this very tricky question, if it is good enough for the ships, why is it not good enough for the planes?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only person who had trouble—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor.

Hon. James Moore: Mr. Speaker, the only person who had trouble with the question was the Liberals in taking three tries to spit it out.

Oral Questions

However, the answer is that we are going down the road to ensuring that the Canadian Forces have the equipment that they need. As we have said time and again, the reality is that the greatest threat to the health and safety of the men and women of the Canadian Forces should never be their equipment. What we saw under 13 years of Liberal rule was a constant degrading of the Canadian Forces' budgets and that can never happen again. If the leader of the Liberal Party does not like the process with regard to the F-35s, all he has to do is look to his left and look to his right because it is his party that started it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bob Rae (Toronto Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I clearly heard a personal insult directed at me. Frankly, I am astonished that the minister would stoop so low. I am not going to return the minister's insults; instead, I am going to ask him a question.

If the use of a fairness officer is good enough for the ships, why is it not good enough for the planes? It is a very simple and direct question.

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the answer is the same whether the question is asked in French or in English. Our process has been clear from the outset. We will ensure that the men and women of the Canadian Forces have the equipment they need to do their job—the job that Parliament and our government is asking them to do. That is what we have done here. The F-35s are a success for these women and men, and we are going to continue with our process.

* * *

[*English*]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, New Democrats joined all Canadians in mourning the tragic loss of Master Corporal Byron Greff on Saturday. Master Corporal Greff and 16 others were struck by a suicide bomb on the outskirts of Kabul.

Will the Prime Minister give the House an update on his current view of the security situation our troops are now facing in Afghanistan?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, like the hon. member, I think all members present would share in expressing our condolences to the family of Master Corporal Greff who gave his life courageously in Afghanistan.

It is a reminder of the unlimited liability assumed by members of the Canadian Forces and our allies in that mission. No one would suggest that the risks will ever be zero in that country, given the current security climate.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last November the Prime Minister assured Canadians that this new training and aid mission in Afghanistan would involve "minimal risks to Canada". Now tragically we see that just is not the case.

We still have 950 troops stationed in Afghanistan. Their families need an honest assessment about the true risks of this new mission.

Why has the Prime Minister not been more clear and straightforward about the real risks our soldiers are facing in Kabul?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Let us be frank, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that this training mission is in a different configuration. It does not involve combat. It does not involve searching and engaging the enemy. It involves training in a static base form in and around Kabul.

There is no way to eliminate all risk given the reality of that country. Given the security climate that is there, we can never mitigate that risk to zero, as I just said, but we certainly want to support our men and women in uniform with equipment. We want to support them morally, and that is what this government—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the F-35s, the Minister of National Defence seems now to be at odds with everyone.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer sees cost overruns of \$53 million per plane. U.S. Senator John McCain sees a train wreck coming. Last week reports surfaced that the minister's friends in cabinet and the Prime Minister's Office are questioning the minister's ability to manage this file.

When will the Minister of National Defence admit he has botched this file and send the contract out to tender?

• (1430)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in 2001 Canada participated in the extensive and rigorous U.S.-led competition process where two bidders developed and competed prototype aircraft—

Mr. Dion: Observer—

Hon. Julian Fantino: Excuse me.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. If members use up all their time when a minister is giving an answer, they may find themselves short of a question.

The Associate Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, partner nations were engaged during the competitive process, and this led to the selection of the Lockheed Martin and its partner agencies as the joint fighter manufacturer for our needs at this time and well into the future.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems that every week the opposition asks a straightforward question and every week the Minister of National Defence fails to answer it.

*Oral Questions***FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

It is a simple but very important question, so I will ask it again. When will the Conservatives finally admit that the F-35 scheme is in a tailspin? When will they start putting Canadian taxpayers first, cancel the F-35 and establish a transparent and competitive process for the replacement of the CF-18?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, through a process launched by the previous Liberal government in the late 1990s—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The minister has been asked a question and he has the right to answer it. The hon. minister has the floor.

Hon. Julian Fantino: Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada determined that the F-35 is the best and only aircraft that meets the needs of Canada's armed forces.

* * *

[*Translation*]

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier-Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week a Commonwealth summit was held in Australia and discussions were held on human rights. Australia and Great Britain raised the issue of decriminalizing homosexuality. Sadly, homosexuality is a crime in 41 of the 54 Commonwealth countries. Decriminalizing homosexuality is a fundamental human rights issue.

Can the Prime Minister confirm whether he raised the issue of homosexual rights at the summit?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the promotion of human rights abroad is a central part of Canada's foreign policy. At the Commonwealth meetings last week, Canada was outspoken on the criminalization of homosexuality. We spoke very strongly against it. We will continue to work with our allies, like the United Kingdom and Australia, on this issue in the days, weeks, months and, regrettably, years to come.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, this weekend in Perth, Canada failed to get the Commonwealth to move on this basic human rights question. What we need is for every Commonwealth leader who believes in ending the state persecution of lesbians, gays, bisexuals and the transgendered to step up right now.

The government has a historic opportunity to provide leadership on this issue which it claims to care about. Could the minister tell me, why did the government fail in Perth? What is the government's plan to take action now to assert leadership on this issue in the Commonwealth?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the hon. member opposite and colleagues on all sides of the House that Canada was the loudest voice on this issue in Perth. We spoke out strongly against it. It is very clear, regrettably, that we will not see immediate changes in this regard, but it is important that we continue to push for human rights, whether it is for gays and lesbians, whether it is for religious freedom, whether it is for women, whether it is for other persecuted minorities. Canadians can count on this government to continue to fight for those issues.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the arrest of Al-Atar, an Edmonton imam, while participating in the hajj is part of a larger problem. Amnesty International has raised concerns about the ill treatment of Saudi prisoners and the country's continued use of the death penalty. This is no place for Canadians to be stranded without government support.

What is the minister doing to improve the treatment of Canadians detained in Saudi Arabia?

• (1435)

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Al-Atar was released from detention today, thanks to the good work of our consular officials and the co-operation of our partners in Saudi Arabia. I can assure the member that we are committed to providing the same level of assistance for all Canadians. However, each case is unique and these cases are very often complex.

We will continue to work with our partners to ensure due process and the well-being of Canadians in distress in Saudi Arabia as we do for Canadians all over the world.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe (Pierrefonds—Dollard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for months now, there have been a number of worrisome cases of Canadians imprisoned in Saudi Arabia. Even more worrisome is how they are being treated. Among them, there is a young man from my riding, Mohamed Kohail. He has been in prison for almost five years and his family still does not know what to expect. He recently contracted tuberculosis in prison and he is gravely ill.

What is the government doing to ensure that Mohamed Kohail gets a fair trial and receives the necessary medical attention?

[*English*]

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada will continue to pursue all avenues to assist Mr. Kohail. A retrial is currently in process for Mohamed Kohail. The last hearing took place this past May. Our government has continuously raised this case with Saudi officials. In total, six ministers and two parliamentary secretaries have raised this matter with top Saudi officials as well. Consular officials are actively providing assistance and support and remain in regular contact with the Kohail family and its legal counsel.

Our government will continue to work—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Quebec.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

VETERANS

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in five days, a former soldier, Pascal Lacoste, will go on a hunger strike outside the offices of the Minister of Veterans Affairs. He is taking this extreme measure to protest the department's lack of action. He has been fighting for 11 years to be heard. Although he is only 38, he is seriously ill after being exposed to depleted uranium, primarily in Bosnia.

Time is running out. Why has the department done nothing in 11 years? What does the Minister of Veterans Affairs plan on doing in order for Mr. Lacoste to receive all—

The Speaker: Order. The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Ms. Eve Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the health and well-being of all our veterans is a priority for our government.

[English]

As soon as this case was brought to the minister's attention, officials were asked to follow up immediately to ensure that this gentleman is receiving all of the benefits to which he is entitled.

I want to be very clear. Our government is maintaining all veterans benefits.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' preoccupation with Arctic defence is proving to be more rhetoric than reality. If they did care about defending our northern sovereignty, they would not be buying a plane that cannot communicate in the Arctic, cannot land in the Arctic, and cannot refuel anywhere. The F-35 simply does not meet Canada's needs.

Therefore, when will the Conservative government hold an open competition to determine the aircraft best suited to all of our needs, including the Arctic?

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the rhetoric around this issue has gone on for an awfully long time. However, the reality is that back in 1997, the Liberal government of the day started this project.

It is the best aircraft for the men and women of our military today and into the future, and as well to ensure that we have control over our sovereignty in years to come.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, why do we not go back to Laurier?

The minister considers it a successful procurement if a plane cannot refuel anywhere, cannot land in the Arctic, cannot communicate in the Arctic, and has only one engine to boot. Instead of holding an open competition to get best value for money, the Conservatives lecture the world on fiscal responsibility.

With structural deficits as far as the eye can see, why can the Conservatives not control the skyrocketing costs of the F-35?

• (1440)

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reasonable people agree that we need aircraft to defend Canadian sovereignty. We will ensure that our men and women in uniform have the best equipment to do their jobs safely and effectively. We expect communications of our aircraft and all other aspects to be in place and that they will exceed current and future capabilities.

The F-35 will ensure that Canada's interests at home and abroad will be well served.

[Translation]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the total cost of the F-35s is now more than \$30 billion, even though the government is denying it. With such a large financial commitment, we must have guaranteed economic spinoffs for Canadian companies, but the Conservatives are dropping the ball. Thirty billion dollars in expenditures and no guaranteed economic spinoffs. That is a fine present for Lockheed Martin in Texas.

When will the Prime Minister admit that an open and public tendering process is needed to guarantee jobs and the economic future of Canada's aerospace industry?

[English]

Hon. Julian Fantino (Associate Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to infuse a dose of reality into this whole argument.

Recently I saw first-hand the direct benefits of economic growth and job creation at Magellan Bristol Aerospace in Winnipeg, as well as that which has taken place in over 60 other companies across the land.

It is not only about the F-35; it is about jobs, it is about economic growth, and it is about providing our men and women with the best tools they need to do their job.

* * *

[Translation]

ASBESTOS INDUSTRY

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I had the honour to table in the House a motion to prohibit the use and mining of asbestos. The evidence is clear: asbestos is an industrial killer. Yet the government continues to blindly support this industry. Canada is the only member country of the United Nations to oppose the inclusion of asbestos on a list of hazardous materials.

Who is this government defending: the workers and families who are the victims of asbestos or large corporations?

Oral Questions

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has promoted the safe and controlled use of chrysotile asbestos domestically and internationally for more than 30 years. Recent scientific reviews confirm that chrysotile fibres can be used safely under controlled conditions. The government respects provincial jurisdiction over the development of natural resources. The NDP would put entire communities out of work and put those workers permanently on welfare. These are the people we are protecting.

[*English*]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, reasonable voices across the country are standing up to the government's support of deadly asbestos.

Here is just one: "I have made the decision that the production and export of asbestos is contrary to the best interests of Canadians".

Do members know who said that? It was Dona Cadman, the former Conservative member for Surrey—North.

Will the government finally act in the best interests of Canadians and support the New Democratic motion to ban asbestos?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, scientific reviews confirm that chrysotile fibres can be used safely under controlled conditions.

Our government respects provincial jurisdiction over the development of natural resources.

The hon. member should appreciate the efforts that are being put in place to avoid a ban of nickel, and it is the same thing for chrysotile asbestos.

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is tying itself up in knots in trying to justify its position on asbestos.

Here is an interesting quote:

I'm definitely not supporting the mining or exporting of asbestos.... [The natural resources minister] is certainly bringing the issue forward to the cabinet level for more discussion.

Who said that? It was the member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Can the Minister of Labour explain to the House what cabinet decided to do about the Conservative hypocrisy on asbestos and give us something other than a tape recorder?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has promoted the safe use of chrysotile domestically and internationally for more than 30 years. Scientific reviews confirm that chrysotile fibres can be used safely under controlled conditions.

The government respects provincial jurisdiction over the development of natural resources. The NDP would put entire communities out of work and put those workers on permanent welfare.

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Lapointe (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is the inaction of this government that is putting workers in a mess.

The asbestos mine workers are worried. Asbestos is a hazardous product. The industry is dying and is no longer even supported by the entire Conservative caucus. Despite all that, it is not getting any help from this government. This government prefers to put short-term profits ahead of the long-term well-being of the asbestos workers and victims. This is unacceptable.

Will this government do the right thing and facilitate the transition of the workers and their families to other sources of income as soon as possible?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada has promoted the safe use of chrysotile at home and abroad for more than 30 years. This is a policy that has been supported by the chrysotile asbestos industry workers, as a matter of fact. I do not know what planet the hon. member has been living on to have such concerns, but I can say that they are unfounded because it is the workers who came up with this safe use policy. Let us be clear: chrysotile fibre can be safely used in a controlled environment, under the regulations in effect.

Our government respects the jurisdiction of the provinces over natural resources development.

* * *

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this weekend members of the Islamic Shia Ithna-Asheri Association of Edmonton learned that their imam, Mr. Al-Atar, was detained without charges in Saudi Arabia.

The member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont went with his son to meet with this community and its leader to hear their concerns and relayed these to the minister's office directly.

Today we are happy to learn that Mr. Al-Atar has been released by Saudi authorities.

At the risk of repeating good news, could the Minister of State please tell the House how the government quickly reacted to learning of Mr. Al-Atar's detention and ultimately assisted in obtaining his release?

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, after being informed of Mr. Al-Atar's arrest, the government made representations to local authorities and senior Saudi officials. We were also in contact with his wife in Canada yesterday and today.

I thank the member for Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont for his excellent work over the weekend liaising with my office. The government is pleased that our concerns about Mr. Al-Atar's situation were addressed in a timely manner and that he has been released.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

TREASURY BOARD

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, once again, we are concerned about the flawed accounting practices that seem to be the norm at the Treasury Board. In 2007-08, Parliament approved \$50 million over five years for the Perimeter Institute, which is an excellent institute, by the way. But according to information from the Receiver General of Canada, the institute received \$127 million, which is 1,200 times the annual maximum approved by Parliament.

Could the President of the Treasury Board rise and explain what happened? Where is the money?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is flat wrong again. It is quite unfortunate that whoever is helping the member did not do his or her math before the NDP members decided to go on with these tactics.

The fact is that in 2007, 2008 and 2009 funds were drawn from government resources, just as we said in the budget, and then subsequent public accounts.

I would recommend that the member consult the public accounts. He can do that. For all the other members who are leading to this misinformation for Canadians, the member continues to be—

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie.

[Translation]

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I encourage my colleague to visit his optometrist.

After overspending the 2009 budget, did they learn their lesson? Obviously not. Once again, this year, although the institute should have received \$10 million, it was granted \$44 million. But the institute never received this money. Strangely enough, this reminds me of another story involving the President of the Treasury Board that has to do with a fund and millions of dollars that were diverted, or something like that. One of our primary responsibilities as parliamentarians is to monitor and approve government spending.

How can we do our job if they are always playing with the numbers?

[English]

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would highly recommend the member give up his day job.

The Public Accounts of Canada are certified by the Comptroller General and the Auditor General. The facts are very clear: the funds for the Perimeter Institute are consistent with the government's commitments.

The question here remains: why has the NDP chosen to attack this world-class institution to score cheap political points, and then be

flat wrong? That member should apologize to the Comptroller General of Canada for an insulting attack.

* * *

• (1450)

G8 SUMMIT

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, new documents show that the Muskoka minister used the G8 as a cover to promote a white elephant vanity project called the Summit Centre. It was sold as a dorm for the media that never came.

One email is particularly disturbing. In it the minister says:

I'm going through Treasury Board to flow funds... I should have the money to you within three weeks. I know your credit card is maxxed!

Where is the paper trail for this vanity project? If the minister does not have the paper trail, then he is going to need to explain why he used Treasury Board as a partisan cash machine.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it will not come as any surprise to the member opposite that I do not agree with the premise of his question.

The government funded 32 public infrastructure projects. All 32 projects had contribution agreements. All 32 projects came in on or under budget. All the documentation was presented to the Auditor General. She has given some good advice on what we can do to be even more transparent and more accountable to Parliament. We completely agree with her wise counsel.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know it is Halloween, but the member does not look dressed up at all, like the beleaguered President of the Treasury Board.

I will go back to the President of the Treasury Board who, on day 144, showed up to work today dressed as the invisible man.

This project did not come in under budget. The government dinged the town for an extra \$9 million.

My colleague from foreign affairs keeps saying this was an arm's-length project. There was nothing arm's-length about it: the minister was up to his neck in pork-barrel partisan politics.

Will the minister explain why he was using Treasury Board to get money for a bogus project like this, which had no justification or paper trail? Where is the paper trail?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this project, like the other 31 projects, had a full contribution agreement that was drafted by officials at Treasury Board. This project is a public infrastructure project that will benefit the people of that municipality for many years to come.

We look forward to having the opportunity to answer even more of the member opposite's questions at committee in short order.

* * *

TOURISM INDUSTRY

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's tourism market share continues to plunge. We have dropped from seventh to fifteenth in international tourism visits.

Oral Questions

The government's failed tourism policies are costing Canada's economy and small businesses thousands of jobs and billions of dollars each year. The government's solution is to treat air travel as a cash cow, slap visitor visas on our most dynamic markets and increase EI payroll taxes. The government's so-called "strategy" is a disaster.

When will the government heed the industry's alarm bells and take action?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, the good news announced by my colleague must be seen as a positive. Businesses in the tourism industry make huge contributions to the Canadian economy and to creating jobs. We implemented Canada's federal tourism strategy to better coordinate the government's efforts, to support the tourism industry and to help Canadian tourism businesses become more competitive, seize opportunities and create jobs for Canadians. So yes, we are accomplishing things and are delivering the goods.

* * *

[*English*]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives sent an SOS warning to Canadian fishers when they went after the three vital S's of the fishery: safety, science and service.

They are slashing safety at sea by closing the maritime rescue sub-centres in St. John's and Quebec. They are slashing science by getting rid of the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council. Now they are slashing service by putting fishing licences out of reach for those without access to the Internet.

Will the minister commit to reversing his plan, which will hurt rural fishers who do not have access to broadband Internet, and keep the current licence application system?

Mr. Randy Kamp (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans and for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her occasional interest in fisheries issues.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, order. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Randy Kamp: Mr. Speaker, I can tell the House what we are not going to do. We are not going to follow the example of this member's party that made massive arbitrary cuts through the 1990s and even as recently as 2005. It cut \$50 million from the science budget.

Our government has a clear vision for a prosperous and viable future of the fishery in Canada. So fearmongering over progressive changes is not the type of—

• (1455)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

[*Translation*]

AUDITOR GENERAL

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, one must be bilingual in order to hold the position of Auditor General of Canada. It is not just the francophones in this country who demand it; the *Canada Gazette* does as well. The job posting clearly stated, "Proficiency in both official languages is essential". The President of the Public Service Commission is right in criticizing this appointment.

Canadians want to know: was the appointment process fair or did the government once again give one of its friends preferential treatment?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely untrue. As we have already said, of course the government looked for bilingual candidates. However, upon completion of a rigorous process, the best-qualified candidate was chosen. Mr. Ferguson has said that he wants to learn French and he is already taking courses.

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not understand why the government did not advertise the job again to give all anglophones a chance to apply. This is not the first time that this government has misled Canadians.

How did a unilingual candidate get through the interview process? Was he not asked any questions in French? This is a direct affront to bilingualism.

One has to wonder: did the government or someone in the government suggest that Michael Ferguson apply for the job even though he is not bilingual?

Hon. Tony Clement (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as we have already said, Mr. Ferguson is a very well-qualified candidate. As we have also already said, he has already started learning French.

[*English*]

I would only add that he is getting rave reviews, including from the former Auditor General, Sheila Fraser, who has indicated her support for his candidacy.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's entrepreneurs are the unsung heroes of the Canadian economy, creating jobs and growth in every region of our country.

Following this month's nomination by *Forbes* magazine as the best place in the world to do business, will the Minister of Industry please tell the House how our entrepreneurs are leading all G20 countries?

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, finally, an excellent question, since *Forbes* magazine did in fact give Canada high marks. There are others who agree, including Ernst & Young, which has ranked the confidence of Canadian entrepreneurs among the highest in the G20. Another report, this one from the McKinsey firm, says that Canada is the best place of any G20 nation to go into business.

These high marks all show that our government made the right decision by keeping taxes low. We will continue on the same path. We will not increase the tax burden by \$10 billion, as the NDP proposed in its campaign platform.

* * *

[English]

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the bill killing the Canadian Wheat Board will be before a legislative committee starting this evening.

While the government cut off discussion, allowing only three days of debate, western grain farmers and Canadians as a whole still have a right to better understand the devastating impact of this legislation.

Will the government allow this committee to travel out west to allow access to the committee, and hear from experts and farmers who will be affected by this legislation? Will the government commit to televising the proceedings so Canadians are not left out of this important process?

Mr. David Anderson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources and for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have not been left out of this important process. It has gone on far longer than the member knows. It went on long before he was ever involved in it.

Our government is committed to passing the marketing freedom for farmers act in a timely and orderly manner to ensure market certainty for farmers. They need market certainty for next year and we intend to do that as quickly as possible.

This legislative committee is an ideal place to examine the bill and its technical nature.

* * *

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while Conservatives make cuts to the University of the Arctic, northerners are wondering what happened to the government's commitment to the north.

As Philip, one of many who has emailed me with these concerns, wrote: "How does the Prime Minister's commitment to Arctic sovereignty, issues of sustainable development and expansion of Canadian understanding of, and co-operation with, peoples of the North coincide with his government's slashing of funding for the University of the Arctic?"

Where is their commitment to the north? What is their answer to Philip and other northerners?

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have and continue to make important and strategic investments to strengthen the economic prosperity and quality of life of northerners. The Government of Canada continues to support the University of the Arctic; however, we have also advised it that we cannot continue to be the only source of funding for this initiative.

Territorial support is crucial to its long-term sustainability and success in Canada. The territories have indicated they wish to explore other options. We respect this decision.

* * *

● (1500)

JUSTICE

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are concerned about crime and gave our Conservative government a strong mandate to keep our streets and communities safe. That is why in the last election we promised to introduce lawful access legislation in due course.

Our approach to this issue has always struck an appropriate balance between police powers needed to protect public safety and the necessity to safeguard the privacy of Canadians. However, there have been exaggerated concerns presented by the opposition.

Could the minister tell the House what our proposed approach to the lawful access legislation will do?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to be clear, no legislation proposed by our Conservative government will allow police to unlawfully read emails without a warrant.

As technology evolves, many criminal activities, such as the distribution of child pornography, become much easier. We are proposing measures to bring our laws into the 21st century and provide police with the tools they need to do their job.

Rather than making things easier for child pornographers or organized crime, I call on the NDP to support these balanced measures to protect law-abiding Canadians.

* * *

[Translation]

CHAMPLAIN BRIDGE

Mr. Jamie Nicholls (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP is calling on the government to stop hiding behind cabinet confidences and to respond to our access to information request by immediately making reports on the safety of the Champlain Bridge available to the public, instead of hiding them from the bridge's users. Every day, 200,000 people cross that bridge, and they have a right to know about its condition.

Will the government finally reveal the information that the cabinet members share freely among themselves, but refuse to share with Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities and for the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the NDP was truly worried about the safety of the Champlain Bridge, it should have voted in favour of our budgets that invested in maintenance for the bridge in 2009. We are doing the work needed to ensure the structure's safety. While the NDP's priority is to scare Canadians, we are looking towards the future with the construction of a new bridge over the St. Lawrence. I therefore invite the hon. member to support us when it comes to replacing the old bridge with a new one.

* * *

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapedia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives misled Quebec regarding the extension of the mission in Afghanistan. The Prime Minister stated last year that there would be minimal risks and that training would take place “on military bases and in classrooms”. Today he said that the mission involves significant risks.

Does this not give us reason to believe that the Prime Minister was not truthful with Quebecers? Will the government acknowledge that it gave false information about the actual risks and that consequently it must put an end to the military mission?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is false. The Prime Minister provided accurate and correct information. It is true that this mission involves significant risks.

[*English*]

This is the reason we continue to support our men and women in uniform with appropriate equipment to protect them, to support them in every way we can. We have nothing but the highest regard, admiration, and respect for the men and women in uniform, and their families, for what they do for our country at home and abroad.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canada—Europe Parliamentary Association, respecting its participation in the 34th annual interparliamentary meeting with the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with Canada and the parliamentary mission to Denmark, the next country to hold the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union, held in Strasbourg, France and Copenhagen, Denmark, September 10 to 17, 2011.

• (1505)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs is rising on a point of order.

Routine Proceedings

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to correct the record. In an answer to a question from the New Democrats, I said contribution agreements were drafted by Treasury Board. Of course, they were drafted by Infrastructure Canada. I regret any false impression I may have left.

The Speaker: I am sure the House appreciates that clarification.

* * *

PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise today to present a petition signed by literally thousands of Canadians from all across Canada who call upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer the world has ever known. The petitioners point out that more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined. They also remind Parliament that Canada remains one of the largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world and spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and curbing international efforts to curb its use.

Therefore, these petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities they live in. They call upon government to end all subsidies of asbestos, both in Canada and abroad, and to stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

CHILD ABDUCTION AND KIDNAPPING REGISTRY

Mr. David Wilks (Kootenay—Columbia, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I am honoured to present a petition on behalf of 5,600 constituents from coast to coast. It calls for a national child abduction and kidnapping registry, informing communities of high-risk offenders. It calls for protocols to nationalize the AMBER Alert program, and to introduce a three tiered classification system for child abduction and kidnapping laws, similar to the Adam Walsh child protection and safety act, passed on July 27, 2006, as the United States federal statute reflects.

It is imperative that we take care of our children in this country and that our communities understand what we will do for them. I present this on behalf of all of them.

MEGA QUARRY DEVELOPMENT

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from people from all over Ontario who are concerned with the proposed mega quarry in Melancthon township in Dufferin county which would be the largest open pit quarry in Canada at over 2,300 acres.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners are concerned about a number of things, one of which is that the proposed mega quarry would remove from production some of Ontario's best farmland. They are asking that the Government of Canada conduct an environmental assessment under the authority of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act on the Highland Companies' proposed mega quarry development.

HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition signed by prominent leaders in the Iranian Canadian community. A similar petition has been signed by thousands of human rights advocates, particularly from the Iranian community in Canada.

The petitioners are bringing the case of Mr. Khavari to Parliament's attention. Mr. Khavari, a dual Iranian-Canadian citizen and former chairman of Iran's largest bank, is wanted for questioning in Tehran. During the time he reportedly obtained his Canadian citizenship, Mr. Khavari led a financial institution belonging to the Iranian revolutionary guards, a known international sponsor of terrorism and the source of much of the violence against civilians during Iran's post-election protests.

The petitioners are requesting that the government investigate the conditions of Mr. Khavari's citizenship to see whether he obtained it by meeting all the legal requirements. This is a growing problem that the Iranian Canadian community is raising with the government. Just today, we read that a second Iranian banker has settled in Montreal. These individuals are associated with the Iranian regime, even if they find themselves on the wrong side of the regime today.

Many Iranian Canadians contacting my office argue that Canada should not be a safe haven for these individuals. It is a slap in the face of so many of the people who have moved to Canada to avoid the torture and violence of this regime.

•(1510)

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition signed by a number of citizens across west central Saskatchewan. They are expressing concern about their fellow Canadians who suffer from both CCSVI, which is chronic cerebral spinal venous insufficiency, and multiple sclerosis. They point out that the unfortunate occurrence of both of those serious diseases can often result in particular treatment being denied with respect to CCSVI.

The petitioners call upon the Minister of Health to consult more broadly and thoroughly with experts in Canada and around the world who actually have direct experience with the treatment of CCSVI. They urge the Minister of Health to proceed with phase 3 clinical trials on an urgent basis and to provide assistance to follow-up on the experience of these patients over time so that Canada can develop the information base that is necessary to ensure that CCSVI is properly treated in Canada with the new technology that is available.

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Rob Anders (Calgary West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the first of thousands of petitions asking to end the patently unfair taxpayer subsidy of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Canadians from British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba and Ontario all want to end the \$1,160,000,000 taxpayer subsidization of the CBC.

Rural Canadians from Innisfail, Alberta; Chemainus, British Columbia; Waldheim, Saskatchewan; and Exeter, Ontario are calling for an end to the \$1 billion public subsidy of the state broadcaster.

When we live in a 1,000-channel universe, why spend over \$1 billion on a state broadcaster like the CBC?

KIDNEY DISEASE

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House today to present two petitions.

The first petition contains many pages of petitioners from Peterborough who want to draw attention to kidney disease that is a huge and growing problem in Canada.

While real progress is being made in a variety of ways of preventing and coping with kidney disease, the petitioners also call upon Parliament to make research funding available to the Canadian Institutes of Health Research for the explicit purpose of conducting bioartificial kidney research as an extension of the research that is being successfully conducted at several centres in the United States.

KURDISTAN

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition comes from Vancouver and is signed by members of the Kurdish community and other concerned Canadian citizens who want to draw attention to the serious violations of human rights by the Kurdistan regional government, KRG, in the northern part of Iraq, Kurdistan.

The petitioners point out that activists, journalists, academics, members of the opposition, political parties and ordinary citizens who have been participating in demonstrations and assemblies are often arrested, tortured and killed. Kurdish towns and cities have been militarized and further opposition has been crushed.

Therefore, the petitioners are calling upon the Government of Canada and all of us to condemn these violations against the demonstrators by the KRG in the northern part of Iraq, Kurdistan.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present two petitions. The first petition is with respect to a matter that has already been brought before us about a particularly compelling matter.

The first petition is from a group of Iranian Canadians who wish to bring to the attention of the House the concerns they have with regard to Mahmoud-Reza Khavari, a former managing director and chairman of the board of the largest state-owned Iranian financial institution, the Mellî Bank. He was also director on the board of another principle state-owned entity, the Sepah Bank.

Routine Proceedings

Of particular concern is Mr. Khavari's alleged settling here in Canada. These two banks, with which Mr. Khavari has been intimately associated, are state-owned entities that have been blacklisted by the United States, the European Union and the United Nations for having assisted Iran, both with respect to its nuclear weaponization program and with respect to its financing of terrorist activities, thereby threatening international peace and security.

The petitioners call upon the government of Canada to recognize the grave concern that Mr. Khavari poses in this regard to peace and security in general. They ask that the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism look into the situation with respect to the acquisition of citizenship and permanent residence, and whether these were acquired by fraud, misrepresentation or any form of concealed material circumstances.

•(1515)

[*Translation*]

FALUN GONG

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present a petition to condemn the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners in China and, in particular, to save members of Canadian families. According to the petitioners, Falun Gong is a beneficial and peaceful spiritual practice based on the principles of truth, compassion and tolerance. In addition, the petitioners claim that in July 2000, China's Communist Party launched a campaign to eradicate Falun Gong, and that 12 members of Canadian families are serving sentences of up to 12 years simply for believing in Falun Gong.

The petitioners are calling on the Canadian government to publicly condemn China's Communist regime for its illegal persecution of Falun Gong practitioners and to save the members of Canadian families mentioned, who are incarcerated in China simply for believing in Falun Gong.

[*English*]

CANADIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure today to present a large number of petitions from Canadians from coast to coast.

The petitioners call upon the government to de-fund the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. They would particularly like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that the Government of Canada funds the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation to the sum of \$1.1 billion per year and that the vast amount of the Government of Canada funding gives the CBC an unfair advantage over its private sector competitors.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to end the public funding of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Stephen Woodworth (Kitchener Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present a petition on a subject that has already been touched upon in the House today and that is the treatment by the government of the People's Republic of China of the Falun Gong, a very peaceful and spiritual group of people who are

exercising their right to pursue their principles of truth, compassion and forbearance.

It is reported that more than 3,448 practitioners have been tortured to death in the People's Republic of China. It is certainly the case that the UN special rapporteur on torture has reported many victims of alleged torture and ill treatment in China as Falun Gong practitioners. There, apparently, are 12 people in forced labour camps in the People's Republic of China who have close family ties to Canadian Chinese citizens. Any free and democratic nation has the responsibility to condemn crimes against humanity wherever they occur.

The petitioners call upon the Canadian government to use every channel possible to call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong, especially when it meets with top Chinese leaders at international forums, and also to help rescue the family members of Canadian residents who are incarcerated because of their belief in Falun Gong.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 129 will be answered today.

[*Text*]

Question No. 129—**Mr. Don Davies:**

With regard to visa holders, for each of the fiscal years from 2001-2002 to 2010-2011, expressed as both a raw number and a percentage of total visas issued, what is the total number of instances of visa holders overstaying the length of their temporary residence visa, (i) in total, (ii) broken down by country of origin of the visa holder, (iii) broken down by issuing visa office?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the CBSA does not collect this type of information.

The CBSA is mandated to ensure the safety and security of Canada's population by taking appropriate enforcement action against individuals who are non-compliant with the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, including investigations, arrests, detentions and removals. In support of its mandate, the CBSA makes use of referrals from Citizenship and Immigration Canada, police, and tips from the public to investigate cases of possible non-compliance.

The CBSA does not proactively monitor foreign nationals who have been authorized to work in Canada. Until such time as Canada has a system in place for exit controls, it is difficult for the CBSA to establish whether foreign nationals authorized to work in Canada have complied with all conditions imposed or have remained in Canada beyond the period of time authorized for their stay.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURN

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 132 and 138 could be made orders for return, these would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Business of Supply

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Text]

Question No. 132—**Ms. Megan Leslie:**

With regard to Environment Canada and the oil and gas sector in Canada: (a) what does Environment Canada's economic modelling show about the effect of a carbon price on natural gas consumption in Canada, relative to business as usual; (b) has Environment Canada performed any assessment or updating of its methane emission factors for natural gas extraction, processing, transmission and distribution, and what is the source of the emission factors it is currently using; (c) has Environment Canada performed any analysis on whether to include oil and gas wells in the National Pollutant Release Inventory such that the composition and volume of fracking fluids would be publicly reported; (d) what recent analysis has Environment Canada performed concerning the structure and use of groundwater resources in Canada; (e) what analysis, if any, has Environment Canada performed concerning the effect of natural gas prices on potential shale gas expansion; (f) what analysis has Environment Canada done concerning the cumulative impacts of natural gas development on Canada's natural environment; (g) what analysis has Environment Canada done concerning the cost per tonne of carbon capture and storage for natural gas processing plants; (h) what analysis has Environment Canada done of changes to disclosure rules concerning gas development in other jurisdictions, and what is Environment Canada's position on those proposals; (i) what analysis has Environment Canada done of "pauses" or moratoria on gas development in other jurisdictions, and what is Environment Canada's position on those proposals; and (j) what analysis, if any, has Environment Canada done on the role of switching to natural gas in reaching Canada's 2020 greenhouse gas emission target?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 138—**Mr. Massimo Pacetti:**

With regard to the constitutional provision that each of the 24 Senators appointed to represent the province of Quebec "shall be appointed for One of the Twenty-four Electoral Divisions of Lower Canada specified in Schedule A to Chapter One of the Consolidated Statutes of Canada", what is: (a) the total population of each of these 24 electoral divisions; (b) the geographic size in square kilometres of each of these 24 divisions; (c) the name and population of the largest urban centre in each of these divisions; and (d) the population, geographic size in square kilometres, and name and population of the largest urban centre of the area in the province of Quebec that is not covered by any division?

(Return tabled)

[English]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—ASBESTOS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

The Speaker: The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles has only three minutes remaining for her speech.

• (1520)

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, the Rotterdam listings are determined by consensus, and if some countries object, the potentially hazardous substance may not be listed. Canada thus

has a negative impact on the effectiveness of the list by being an obstacle to it, when the list advocates better international health through better control over exports of toxic substances. The NDP would like to urge that asbestos be included in the Rotterdam Convention list, which will force exporters like Canada to warn importing countries of any health risk. Those countries could then refuse to import asbestos if they did not think they could handle the product safely.

As well, a motion like this one today does not mean that we have to abandon the asbestos mine workers. On the contrary, support from the federal government is essential to assist the workers affected, who have given their time, effort and health to this ailing industry. The government must also implement urgent measures to revitalize the economy in these entire regions, which have already suffered for too long.

The NDP is suggesting concrete actions that will enable these workers to re-enter the labour market and other measures for older workers that will protect their well-being and their retirement. We all know that when a mine closes in a single-industry town, the entire community feels the effects. It is not just the mine that closes; the small business that provides goods and services to the mine also closes, along with businesses in the municipality, such as car dealerships, grocery stores, travel agencies, and so on.

No jobs, no goods and services consumed. To counteract those effects and protect the people living in the regions affected, the NDP recommends that the workers and communities affected be consulted and investments be made in the economic development of the communities affected by the mine closure. For workers approaching retirement, it recommends that a transitional period be provided to allow them to end their careers with dignity and that an early retirement benefit be implemented. For younger workers, it proposes that training measures and labour market re-entry measures be implemented. That is the fair and long-term solution proposed by the NDP, a solution that respects families, the economy, the health of our fellow Canadians, and also our international reputation, which must be allowed to shine again.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find it very odd to hear speech like that. In 2006, the Quebec section of the NDP proposed, at the party's policy convention in Quebec City, and I quote: "that the [NDP] vote in favour of the safe production and responsible use of chrysotile." Can the hon. member on the other side of the House tell us whether those Quebec members support the real people on the ground, the ones who created the safe use policy, or the elites that run the NDP's party machine?

I would also like to know how she explains the fact that the member for Outremont participated in a unanimous resolution of the National Assembly in 2004 objecting to the inclusion of chrysotile in the Rotterdam list, when he has now done a complete about-face. How can these mutually exclusive positions, to say the least, be explained? The chrysotile workers' union is doing a lot of lobbying and bringing pressure to bear to show that chrysotile can be used safely and that it has been the most widely used mineral in the world. And yet what is now being advocated is that we move toward substitutes, although there are no data about their safety.

Business of Supply

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, among the 10,918 workers in the asbestos mines and mills in Quebec and in an asbestos products plant whose mortality was studied up to 1992, there were 38 deaths from mesothelioma. A few years later, between 1988 and 2003, 59 cases of mesothelioma were recognized as occupational pulmonary diseases in workers at the asbestos mines and mills in Quebec. Forty-three of them had died between 1993 and 2003 and they were born after the people who were included in the 10,918 workers, thus doubling the number of mesothelioma cases reported in this industry. As well, between 1988 and 2003, there were 198 cases of asbestosis and 203 cases of lung cancer in addition to the mesothelioma cases. That is why we have to ban sending these products to developing countries, where people do not know how to use them properly.

• (1525)

Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to know what my colleague thinks about the part of the motion that talks about support for workers and the industry.

Would it not be possible for the government to stop subsidizing and paying for trade delegations that go to other countries to promote asbestos? Would it not be possible for the government to stop spending hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on the asbestos industry? Would it not be possible for the government to take all that money and invest it in a fund? That way, first, we could diversify the Canadian economy, something we often hear about from the other side, the government side, and second, it could also help the workers so they do not find themselves with no money when asbestos stops being produced and exported.

I would like to hear my colleague's comments on that.

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for her question.

NDP MPs met with asbestos workers in early September. For now, it is the older workers who remain. There are roughly 300 or 400 jobs in the asbestos industry at present. What these workers want is an honourable transition for the time they have left before retirement. There are very few young people and some workers are even being redirected to other jobs, in the commercial sector for example. Between 25% and 30% of the population already works outside Thetford Mines and Asbestos.

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, for Official Languages and for the Economic Development Agency for the Regions of Quebec, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour for me to rise in this House and defend this important issue for the province and regions of Quebec. Canada has been promoting the safe use of chrysotile asbestos at home and abroad for more than 30 years. That is why I would once again like to express our government's support for the asbestos-producing regions.

Canada monitors the use of chrysotile and promotes its safe use around the world. Canada does not ban the mining of naturally occurring substances. Natural resources are the driver of Canada's economic success. Banning the mining of any naturally occurring substance would have an adverse effect on the entire natural resources sector. During the last election campaign, our government

said it would not ban a natural resource that is traded around the world.

This government will not place a Canadian industry in a position where it would be subject to negative discrimination in a market where the sale is permitted. Canada's production for export is worth almost \$100 million, or approximately 10% of global production. Our government is aware of the importance of this industry in Quebec. I would also like to mention our government's efforts to diversify regional economies. For example, there is the strong support for the SADCs in Les Sources and Thetford Mines, which have worked tirelessly on the economic diversification of these regions.

Efforts in this regard include, among others, the gas pipeline between Vallée-Jonction and Thetford Mines, an important project that was recently announced in the presence of the Prime Minister. With this investment of more than \$18 million, the government is making possible the construction of a \$24 million pipeline that will provide access to a reliable and less costly source of energy, natural gas. The project will contribute to the economic development and diversification of the region and surrounding communities. This contribution by the Government of Canada is an exceptional measure for the economic diversification of this region.

I am also thinking of the \$474,000 in funding provided to set up and run two research centres in Thetford Mines, which are the pride of the business community in the region. The Centre de technologie minérale et de plasturgie received \$170,000 in 2007 and provides professional expertise in plastics and mineral technology.

Having said that, in Canada, exposure to chrysotile is strictly controlled by maximum exposure limits in workplaces issued by federal, provincial and territorial government and by restrictions on certain categories of consumer products and products in the workplace under Canada's Hazardous Products Act.

Importing countries are solely responsible for their decision to import products, such as chrysotile, and implementing appropriate measures to ensure the health and safety of their workers. We implemented measures to protect the health and safety of those working in the mining sector, especially workers who handle chrysotile, a long time ago.

Our knowledge in this area is constantly growing, just like our knowledge of many other products that can pose a risk or danger when we are not very familiar with their attributes. For many decades now, we have been making a distinction between amphibole and chrysotile, and we have implemented regulatory mechanisms to protect workers in this sector.

Business of Supply

The illnesses that we are currently seeing in countries that have made heavy use of asbestos fibres are related to exposure to high doses in the past and inappropriate practices that were prohibited and abandoned in Canada in the late 1970s. Completely banning chrysotile is not necessary or appropriate because doing so will not protect workers or the public from past uses that have been prohibited for many years now. Since 1988, all federal, provincial and territorial regulations on health and safety in Canada that pertain directly or indirectly to working with or around asbestos are consistent with the International Labour Organization's 1986 Convention concerning Safety in the Use of Asbestos, Convention 162.

•(1530)

Canada was one of the leaders in the development of this convention.

Importing nations alone are responsible for their decisions related to the import of products, including chrysotile, and for the implementation of measures to ensure the health and safety of their workers. However, we strongly encourage importing nations to put mechanisms in place to ensure the controlled use of chrysotile and products containing chrysotile.

Once again, since this point bears repeating, in Canada, exposure to chrysotile is strictly controlled by workplace exposure limits.

These limits are set by the federal, provincial and territorial governments. Exposure is also controlled by banning certain categories of consumer products and products in the workplace under Canada's Hazardous Products Act.

The purpose of these regulations is to prevent consumers from being exposed to products containing asbestos, the fibres of which can detach, be inhaled and thus be harmful to health.

It is important to note that the development of natural resources is an area of provincial jurisdiction. Prohibiting the mining of a natural resource would infringe on provincial jurisdiction.

Our government has always had great respect for provincial jurisdictions. With that in mind, I find this motion troubling, since it was moved by the NDP, a party that claims to defend Quebec's interests. This is clearly not the case, especially when we consider the fact that the Government of Quebec supports the chrysotile industry.

If my colleagues do not believe me, they should listen to the following quotes from Premier Jean Charest:

"The government has not changed its mind. It will continue to defend the safe use of chrysotile, a policy that should be defended." That quote was from April 12, 2010.

"Quebec promotes the safe use of chrysotile. That is what we do at home and that is what is encouraged throughout the world." That was Premier Jean Charest on January 29, 2010.

I have to wonder why the NDP is seeking to punish Quebec instead of rising to defend the people who voted for it. What is worse is that the NDP must be aware that this topic is very important in Quebec.

If that is not aware, that means it is ignoring its own members from Quebec. For example, in 2006, at the NDP's convention in Quebec City, the NDP's Quebec section proposed that the NDP vote in favour of the safe production and responsible use of chrysotile. This was resolution 4J3. In the same resolution, the Quebec section of the NDP even recognized that chrysotile could be used safely.

Will the Quebecers on the other side of the House tell us whether they support the people from the regions or the elites who run the NDP's political machine? I wonder, because they obviously cannot support both sides at the same time.

In 1984, the Government of Canada got together with the Government of Quebec, the industry and labour unions associated with the Canadian chrysotile industry to create the Chrysotile Institute. The governments recognized the need to promote the controlled use of chrysotile through health and safety training programs, technology transfers and information sessions. These initiatives generated a lot of interest, both from producers and from countries that use chrysotile.

The Chrysotile Institute has carried out research and provided information and training workshops on dust control for unions and workers since its creation. It has also provided training programs for medical monitoring and contributed to the transfer of knowledge and technology to more than 60 countries.

The institute has fostered the development and implementation of regulations and best practices throughout the world. These initiatives have helped developing countries adopt workplace health and safety practices in accordance with the requirements of the International Labour Organization's Convention No.162 concerning safety in the use of asbestos.

•(1535)

In February 2008, the Government of Canada confirmed \$250,000 in funding over three years for the Chrysotile Institute to carry out its mandate. The agreement between the Government of Canada and the institute is still in effect, under the same terms, and will end on March 31, 2012.

Through our partnership with the Chrysotile Institute we inform the public of the technical means, control measures, standards and best practices for the production and handling of chrysotile fibre.

Over the years, this same partnership has facilitated the global transfer of know-how and technology, which strengthens our economy.

In this regard, I would like to reiterate that we have always emphasized economic growth and job creation for Canadians. I know that we can be proud of the 656,000 new jobs that have been created since the depths of the recession in July 2009, the best job growth in the G7. We can also celebrate the fact that our unemployment rate is steadily decreasing and has now reached 7.1%, the lowest rate since December 2008.

Business of Supply

Through our world-class economic action plan, which the NDP opposed, we have established partnerships with the provinces to provide training and financial assistance to affected workers in order to keep them in the job market.

With respect to work-sharing agreements with employers, labour market agreements and labour market development agreements with the provinces, and with excellent funding by our economic action plan, our government provided close to \$3.5 billion to Quebec in skills and employment funding. This is a whole series of economic measures that the NDP has opposed.

The work-sharing program was developed to help companies that were experiencing temporary slowdowns to avoid layoffs while they got back on their feet by providing income support in the form of employment insurance to workers whose number of hours of work per week had been reduced. Employers are able to keep their employees and avoid the costs of having to rehire and retrain, while employees are able to continue working and keep their skills up to date. Workers who are laid off at the end of the work-sharing agreement are entitled to regular employment insurance benefits based on their rate of pay prior to their participation in the work-sharing program.

As of October 16, 2011, there were 5,774 workers participating in 145 active work-sharing agreements in Quebec. Sometimes, however, individuals have to transition to a new career in order to continue working.

Although the federal government recognizes that the provinces and territories are responsible for designing and carrying out labour market programs, it is providing a great deal of support to Quebec to help Quebecers get the training they need to find employment. Since 2008-09, the government has provided Quebec with over \$3.5 billion in funding related to skills and employment. This includes close to \$360 million under the economic action plan to help Quebecers affected by the economic slowdown to upgrade their skills and retrain.

This year alone, Quebec will receive over \$750 million in funding for its skills and employment priorities. These significant investments were recognized by Quebec when the province announced its Pacte pour l'emploi.

The 2007 budget established the foundation for this new labour market architecture, which provides a labour market program for those who need it, while encouraging employers to provide more training. This new architecture also clarifies roles and responsibilities by recognizing that the provinces and territories are in the best position to develop and implement labour market training.

This was done through bilateral agreements called labour market agreements, which are supported by an annual federal investment worth \$500 million paid to the provinces and territories on an equal per capita basis.

These agreements were created in order to fill the gap in labour market programs concerning those who do not currently qualify for training under the employment insurance program and in order to encourage employers to provide more training for their employees.

The provinces and territories, including Quebec, have the primary responsibility for developing and implementing programs, thereby offering greater flexibility in understanding and meeting the particular needs of local and regional labour markets.

• (1540)

As part of our economic action plan, which the NDP did not support, thereby jeopardizing our economic recovery, the federal government invested more money in labour market development agreements through the strategic training and transition fund. This fund was created in order to target the specific needs of individuals affected by the economic downturn, regardless of whether they qualified for employment insurance. The fund allowed the provinces and territories greater flexibility in order to target local and regional labour market realities. This helped to ensure that all Canadians would have access to the training and assistance they need to get back to work.

The strategic training and transition fund provided \$55 million over two years and was administered through existing labour market development agreements in Quebec. Labour market development agreements exist above and beyond labour market development agreements—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Order. The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île on a point of order.

Ms. Ève Péclét: Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind the hon. member that today the debate is on the asbestos industry and not on the government's economic action plan. I have been listening since the beginning of his speech and the first two or three minutes were on today's debate on asbestos. However, for the past five or six minutes, I have heard him talk about the government's economic action plan and the 650,000 jobs that have been created. This has nothing to do with the debate we are having today in this House on the asbestos industry.

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): We have had several points of order raised today during the debate on relevance. I will reiterate the point that I made earlier this morning.

There is a matter before the House and there is a Standing Order that requires members to address that issue. It is the practice of the House that members are given a significant amount of latitude in terms of their remarks, whether they want to deal with the issue narrowly or more broadly. I would ask for the co-operation of all members in that regard.

[Translation]

Resuming debate. The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to resume debate. This is a question that the hon. member asked her own colleague earlier. It is an explanation to which she should take the time to listen. It would be to her advantage.

Business of Supply

Labour market agreements exist above and beyond labour market development agreements, which help workers who currently qualify for employment insurance benefits to gain more skills and obtain more training. Paid for through employment insurance premiums, labour market development agreements allow individuals who have recently lost their jobs through no fault of their own to access training in order to make it easier for them to transition to another career.

Canada is currently investing close to \$2 billion a year in the provinces and territories by way of this system. Since 2008, Quebec has received \$2.4 billion through labour market development agreements to help its workers. What does this mean for Quebec workers? In the 2009-10 fiscal year, 205,411 people took advantage of the services offered by these programs, which provided 62,015 interventions pertaining to employment-related benefits and 173,297 interventions pertaining to employment assistance services. Clearly, our government, under the leadership of our Prime Minister, has made a significant investment to help unemployed workers get the training they need to transition to new careers.

As a result, and in conclusion, we reject the premise of the opposition's motion, which seeks to cast aspersions on one of Quebec's long-standing natural resource industries. We also reject the opposition's argument that separate funding is key to helping our workers transition to another industry since our government has already provided for the assistance necessary to help workers who wish to transition to another career should they feel the need to do so.

• (1545)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the Minister of Industry said that exporting natural resources was a provincial responsibility, which is absolutely false. The export of Canadian minerals is the federal government's responsibility.

What is more, the Minister of Industry compared nickel mines, where I worked for 34 years, to asbestos mines. There are a lot of nickel mines in my riding. If the Minister of Industry is not familiar with the difference between asbestos mines and nickel mines, then I invite him to come to Nickel Belt. We will show him the difference between an asbestos mine and a nickel mine.

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for that question. I would like to reiterate that Canada has been promoting the safe and controlled use of chrysotile at home and abroad for 30 years. If the hon. member wants to stand up for the Canadian mining sector, then he should just vote against his party's motion.

[English]

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the NDP member who brought forward the point of order noted, the parliamentary secretary spoke very little of substance toward the motion and much of his speech was on other issues, promoting his government in areas that really were not associated whatsoever with the motion.

This makes one conclude that possibly the parliamentary secretary is not personally very proud or supportive of the government's position on this issue. He certainly did not have very many words to

develop an argument for why he supported the government's position.

I have a specific question about section (b) of the motion. The parliamentary secretary talked about demonizing an industry. In fact, the motion also asks that the government "support international efforts to add...asbestos to the list of hazardous chemical products under the Rotterdam Convention". India, an exporter and importer, supported the Rotterdam Convention.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain why the government would not add its voice to something of which even India is in support?

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, adding chrysotile to the list was debated during meetings of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam Convention in 2011, 2008 and 2006. All three times, the parties postponed the decision to their next meeting for lack of consensus. The hon. member's party was in power at the time. There are still former health ministers and natural resource ministers here. I would like the hon. member to tell us how her party plans to vote to stand up for Canada's mining resources.

• (1550)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, after question period and the intervention by the member for Nickel Belt, there remains a great deal of confusion. First, during question period, I said that natural resource development, and not exports, is the jurisdiction of the provinces. Second, the member knows very well that there is international pressure on the nickel industry to ban this metal. That is what I wanted to say.

The NDP is going after chrysotile; what will be next? Will it be uranium, the oil sands, all the country's natural resources? The NDP has absolutely no credibility. I would even say that the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, who talked about the workers, is out of sync with them. The workers established a policy on the safe use of chrysotile, they supported it, they developed it.

I know that my colleague has an email from Luc Lachance, the union president, in his hands. What does he have to say?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I would like to personally congratulate my colleague, the minister, who does an excellent job standing up for the people in his region. I do have an email from Luc Lachance, president of the steelworkers union at LAB Chrysotile. It was sent to the opposition party and says:

It is utterly appalling and unacceptable that you support banning chrysotile in Canada. In addition to the loss of approximately 1,000 direct and indirect jobs, you are preventing the Canadian industry from sharing its expertise with the rest of the world. In addition, when you manage to shut down chrysotile mining in Canada and the export of this supposedly hazardous product to other countries, I promise you that I will be there to stop the import, export and production of all other hazardous goods...

This email was sent directly by the union to the opposition party, the NDP.

Business of Supply

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech given by my colleague across the floor. I was particularly interested to hear him say that the countries that import chrysotile are solely responsible for implementing appropriate measures to ensure the health and safety of their workers. I would remind my colleague that, at this time, we export chrysotile asbestos primarily to developing countries. Furthermore, at the international summit in Geneva, Canada was the only country to oppose adding chrysotile asbestos to the list of hazardous products under the Rotterdam Convention. Even India, which currently exports chrysotile asbestos, agreed that it should be put on the list.

In the opinion of the member opposite, why does this government insist on being the odd man out and refuse to join with the other nations in banning this dangerous substance?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, at the risk of repeating myself, for the past 30 years, Canada has been promoting the safe and controlled use of chrysotile, as well as the same standards both in Canada and abroad.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, does the parliamentary secretary think that what the NDP is trying to do is shut down the natural resource industry in Canada? I know the member for Nickel Belt is sensitive to this. However, if we look at the NDP record from the last Parliament, that party brought forward not one but two bills that would essentially eliminate the natural resource industry from competition, first, on the ability of mining companies to base themselves in Canada and, second, on the environmental regulations which were so stringent they would shut down the industry.

I wonder if the member could comment on what he thinks the NDP's motive is in the big picture.

• (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question that highlights the official opposition's conflicting positions regarding the Canadian mining industry. I would like that party to take a clear position. When it is organizing conventions, it supports the mining industry, but here in the House, it takes the opposite position. More consistency on the part of the opposition would be nice. The Canadian mining industry is an important economic sector. It is the driving force of our country's economy and we will proudly defend it.

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not think that the member is thinking about the victims. There are millions of victims who face health problems and death. Asbestos can be compared to Agent Orange. The member may laugh, but I would like to know what he will tell the victims who do not have access to a health care system that can adequately treat their illness. Is the government prepared to invest so that they have access to a health care system and can go to another country to receive care?

Mr. Jacques Gourde: Mr. Speaker, I am proud of Canada's health care system, which is one of the best systems in the world and which the government is maintaining along with the provinces. I hope that the members opposite are not challenging Canada's health care

system, which is one of the best in the world. I would like the member to apologize.

[English]

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Newton—North Delta.

Before I get into my speech, today is Halloween. Yesterday when I left home I talked to two of my children and asked them to let mom or grandma inspect any candy they bring home today before eating it. I urge all parents to check the candies that the goblins bring home and make sure it is safe before they allow their children to eat it. I also urge all Canadians to take care when driving tonight and to watch for the young goblins and trick-or-treaters.

Today I rise to speak to the NDP's motion on asbestos. The NDP has long called for an end to asbestos exports to third world countries. The motion calls for a ban on the use and export of all forms of asbestos and a just transition plan for asbestos-producing workers and communities.

The motion would ensure that older asbestos workers have a decent standard of living through their retirement. It also calls for an investment fund to support diversification of the economy in the asbestos-producing regions.

On my first day in the House, I arrived here with Conservative members, Liberal members and my NDP colleagues on one of the green buses that circulate on Parliament Hill. As soon as we entered the grounds, I noticed one of the buildings was covered in a building envelope. I asked my colleagues what was going on with the building. A number of them replied. Not only my NDP colleagues but also my Conservative colleagues offered insight into what was going on with the building.

The Parliament buildings have been undergoing extensive renovations over the years. Millions of dollars have been spent to renovate these buildings. When I asked my colleagues why the buildings were being renovated, they said it was to get rid of the asbestos which is a carcinogen and is harmful. They also said that asbestos is not used in Canada anymore because the product is bad and there are concerns. It was good to hear that I would be working in a healthy workplace and that I would not be exposed to harmful substances or materials on the Hill. It was helpful to find out that this product was being removed from the Parliament buildings.

I did some research after that. There are school buildings and other public buildings that have been cleaned. There are many projects where asbestos is being removed from buildings. Why is that? The facts indicate that it is a harmful product, but my Conservative colleagues do not believe in facts nor do they rely on any kind of science. Asbestos has been shown to be harmful. That is why it is being removed from the Parliament buildings, schools and other buildings across the country.

Business of Supply

Asbestos is a product which has been proven to be harmful. It is a carcinogen. It causes disease. Many years ago the government took steps to ban its general use in buildings, and rightfully so. The million dollar question is, why are the Conservatives so bent on exporting it to third world countries? Why do they want to export death to the unsuspecting workers and the public in other countries?

• (1600)

I have been sitting here since this morning and I have not heard a satisfactory response. The Conservatives will tell us a lot of other stuff, which I will talk about.

Canada is the only developed country that exports asbestos to other countries. In fact, most of the European Union, over 50 countries, have banned the use of asbestos. Most of the developed world has banned the use of asbestos. What do we do? We export this product which is known to be harmful, which causes cancer, which kills people. I have seen emails from people who say that it sucks the life out of people. Yet we export tonnes and tonnes to third world countries where not only are workers exposed to it, but who knows where this material ends up. The general public in those countries may be exposed to asbestos as well.

Generally speaking, the workers do not have any training on its, as the Conservatives would say, safe controlled use. In fact, no studies have been done to show that asbestos can be used in a safe and controlled manner. That type of use is not supported by facts. My friends across the aisle, the Conservatives, would have us believe, and will say over and over again, that asbestos can be used in a safe and controlled manner. I think the Canadian public knows better. Canadians know when someone is not stating the facts. I have been sitting here this morning and the Conservatives keep saying that, but it is absolutely not true.

There are many concerns regarding health and safety. Asbestos has been banned in Canada. It is used on a limited basis in certain products. It was interesting to read about what asbestos does. All asbestos materials break down into fibres so tiny they cannot be seen. People would not know whether they are breathing in asbestos. All of it breaks down into tiny particles which people cannot see with their eyes. In places where asbestos is present people could breathe it in and contract a disease that could eventually kill them.

There are various estimates as to how many people are killed by asbestos material. The World Health Organization estimates that anywhere from 90,000 to 100,000 people die each year from this particular disease.

The Conservatives will claim that chrysotile asbestos is safe if it is used in a controlled manner. That is not supported by facts. The Conservatives will also tell us that the mining industry is a provincial jurisdiction. However, exports are governed by the federal government, so we can certainly ban the export of this material, the export of death to third world countries. This is a matter of human rights. We want to ensure Canada's reputation is kept intact and that we remain leaders in safeguarding the health not only of Canadians, but of citizens around the globe.

• (1605)

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member is so supportive of the mining industry,

why, in the last Parliament, did his party introduce legislation that would essentially shut down the mining industry?

That is a contradiction by the NDP and that is why Canadians are so perplexed and cynical about the NDP position. On the one hand NDP members say they want to protect the environment to the nth degree. They do not believe in the ability of remediation for mining sites or the ability to have a proper balance between resource extraction and the environment. It is really just NDP members spouting off rhetoric that has no basis in reality.

I wonder if the member could reconcile the many extremes of the NDP. It is like an octopus. NDP members have eight or nine positions on everything but stand for nothing.

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, there we go again with Conservatives back to their talking points.

This material is so toxic. We know that from facts from the World Health Organization, the Canadian Cancer Society, physicians, and from all the evidence. In all credible research that has been done, asbestos was shown to be toxic, carcinogenic and it kills people.

Yet, Conservatives are also starting to realize that this material is actually toxic because I have not actually heard them use the word "asbestos". We are talking about asbestos. We are not talking about mining. They are talking about mining. We are talking about asbestos, the product that kills citizens across not only this nation but other parts of the world. We need to take a stand to protect the lives of people, not only in Canada but across the globe.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote from an open letter sent to the MP for Sarnia—Lambton and I would like the hon. member to comment. The letter reads:

Only industry-funded institutions such as the Chrysotile Institute, which is a registered lobbyist for the asbestos industry, promote chrysotile asbestos and claim, against all independent evidence, that it can be safely used...In Canada, chrysotile asbestos is classified as a hazardous substance under Canadian law in order to protect Canadians. Yet the Chrysotile Institute, and unfortunately, also [the Prime Minister] refuse to allow people in the developing world this same basic human rights to be informed about a substance that can harm and kill you. This double standard, in our opinion, is morally indefensible and brings Canada into extreme disrepute internationally.

Could the member comment on that, please?

• (1610)

Mr. Jasbir Sandhu: Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government spends hundreds of thousands of dollars every year on a lobby group that will lobby in different parts of the world. In fact, over the last number of years, \$50 million has been spent on the government's lobby efforts to lobby this killer product, asbestos, and to have this product sold in other third world developing countries.

With regard to having some sort of warning, the Rotterdam Convention would basically list asbestos as a hazard. There would be some sort of warning to people handling this material, or to countries that are buying it, that this material has the ability to kill and that it has the ability to cause cancer.

Business of Supply

Three times in the last five years the government has rejected that idea. That is shameful. This is not my Canada. I do not want to see my Canada export asbestos and not take a leadership role in protecting the lives of people.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims (Newton—North Delta, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here today debating a ban on asbestos and to share the impacts that the mining and use of asbestos have on people around the globe. Being one of the largest exporters of this death trap, we have to take responsibility. I have heard my colleagues across the way say the NDP is against mining or ask what New Democrats have against the resource industry. I find that argument very disingenuous. We are here to talk about asbestos and the impact of it on human lives, so let us focus on that.

The government's argument would have us say that because I am for pharmaceutical drugs, I therefore support cocaine and heroine. That is a fallacious argument. It is using that kind of argument to stop itself from actually dealing with the debate and the issue at hand today.

I had the privilege of arriving in Canada in 1975. I was a young teacher in England. That was my first job. My second job was to teach in Quebec and I was very excited. My husband and I arrived in Thetford Mines. We were both teachers and were hired to teach there. I worked at Cégep, the high school and with seniors. I fell in love with Canada at that time. I must admit that the climate was a bit much. When the cold winter arrived, I shivered a lot, but I fell in love with the snow and started to realize that once could use it in a very effective way. I discovered snowshoeing, skiing and all of those things. However, I discovered something else as the snow started to melt.

I had heard a lot about asbestos. Remember that I am speaking about 1975. It was only as the snowbanks started to melt that I saw the layers of asbestos fibres in the snow. It caused me a great deal of concern and at that stage I remember thinking that I had to do some research because if fine fibres of asbestos were caught in snowbanks, what impact must it be having on my lungs. My husband and I decided at that stage to move from Thetford Mines, about a 45-minute drive away. We thought we were actually escaping the asbestos fibres. Lo and behold, in a little village called Kinnear's Mills, the snow came and I thought it was absolutely pristine until the spring came and the thaw began. Once again, I saw that even 45 minutes away, those fine fibres were there.

At that stage, my husband and I made the choice that we would not stay in that area because by that time we had a baby and we were concerned about the impact of asbestos. Since those days we have a come a long way in Canada. We now recognize that Canada is regulated under the Hazardous Products Act. When asbestos is found in schools, it is removed immediately, and Parliament buildings are shut down so asbestos can be removed because we know that asbestos does harm.

In the same way, our workforce is also regulated, but despite all of the regulations that exist, there are still a huge number of deaths due to asbestos. The cost to the health care system is absolutely amazing. This is in a country that has many regulations. La Commission de la santé et de la sécurité du travail du Québec conducted a study showing that the cost of disability payments to 691 workers suffering

from an asbestos-related occupational illness exceeded \$66 million by the year 2000.

• (1615)

Here we are talking about dollars, but today through questions and other speakers, we have actually heard the real impact on families as they watched a loved one die due to asbestos, something that we can prevent and that we are trying to prevent here.

I have a question to my colleagues across the floor. Why, then, is the government not willing to sign on to the Rotterdam Convention and say that this is one of those hazardous materials? India, one of our major importers, after a few years of making the same mistake, has now seen daylight and is willing to sign on to this convention. The country that is standing in the way is Canada. The arguments we are hearing are economic arguments about mining and the money it brings in. We are not talking about the death we are exporting.

It is very easy for us to say that the countries we export to can put all kinds of regulations in place but look at the major countries we export to. We export to Indonesia, India and the Philippines. It is no secret that in India the literacy rate is still very low in many parts of the country. It is also no secret that there is very little regulation and oversight into these kinds of hazardous materials. Yet, knowing that this material causes grave harm, we are prepared to sell it.

This question comes to my mind. We all set our hair on fire whenever we hear Colombia or other countries are selling drugs that end up on our streets and do our children harm. I am one of those. I am a mother and a teacher. I care very deeply. I do not want those drugs on my streets because they are dangerous. Then why are we, a developed nation, exporting a product that is causing deaths of a similar and greater magnitude in developing countries? I ask colleagues, from all sides of the House, that we stop and think about the harm this fibre, this asbestos, is doing to men, women and children.

We are not talking about dollars here. For jobs, the NDP motion has built into it a need for us to have diversification, a need for us to invest in other greener and more healthier economies. Let us invest in our manufacturing industries. Let us look at other possibilities. Let us do a transition plan for workers who are employed in this industry right now. That is the action that we need to take. That is what responsible government is all about.

What kind of a reputation do we want to have in the world? That there is a product that we do not want to be used here, but we are willing to sell it overseas where it can have a very high death rate due to that problem, but it is not our problem because we have our dollars in our pocket.

This cannot be about dollars in the Canadian government's pockets. I know Canadians. Canadians are compassionate and caring people. They would not want to make a very minuscule profit, or even a big profit, at the expense of imposing on other countries massive deaths of men, women and children.

Business of Supply

We are all wearing our poppies today and this week we are going to be remembering the men and women who sacrificed their lives for the freedom of men, women and children in other countries. So today I appeal to the goodness in all of us in the same way.

• (1620)

Let us keep in mind that we are Canadians. If we think a product is hazardous for us, it is hazardous for others. Let us not export death.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my colleague's speech attentively and in astonishment.

[*English*]

She said that when she was in Thetford Mines she would find asbestos in the snow and things like that. These kind of things are insulting for our community.

We are talking about the safe use of asbestos. We are not talking about the old-fashioned use of the 1950s or the 1960s or about stories like she mentioned. I do not have any dust on my coat. It is bad debate that frightens people. It is unacceptable. The safe-use policy has been developed by the workers and we now have international expertise to ensure that this stuff is used properly.

Could she guarantee us that if she comes back to Thetford Mines after so many years and finds asbestos, she will take a picture and bring it back to the House? Is this what she mentioned? This is what I understood from her speech and it is totally inappropriate.

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the stories I told of 1975 and 1976 were actual stories of what I experienced in my life. They were not made up. I did say in my speech that we had come a long way since then. However, we still know today that asbestos is dangerous, that it causes bodily harm. It is because of that we are having this debate today and asking for a ban on us exporting asbestos or, as I said earlier, death to other countries.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for recalling some of the issues around asbestos. I was in the construction industry for many years. At that time, the exposure that the average worker would have to asbestos was really quite unfortunate. No one knew any better. We know better these days.

My question, though, is about the Conservatives linking the whole mining industry in Canada with asbestos.

Would my colleague not agree that this is actually quite a dangerous strategy on the part of the government? We have an industry that is vilified around the world, and that is the asbestos industry. We have a Canadian mining industry that has huge investments around the world, a Canadian mining industry that for future investments will be judged on its Canadian attitude, Canadian performance, the type of direction that it takes the whole industry. If we tie the mining of asbestos to our major mining industry, as the Conservatives are trying to do today, is that not actually a very bad strategy for the future for our own mining industry?

• (1625)

Ms. Jinny Jogindera Sims: Mr. Speaker, the kind of relationship that is being built by our colleagues across the floor has really been bothering me, saying that just because we are speaking against the dangers and the impact of asbestos, we are speaking against all mining. Linking it with all mining and all the other minerals and ores that we mine in our amazing mining industry, does not do service to our resource sector. I actually think it sends a very mixed and funny message out there.

We are not talking about mining or our resources in general. We are talking about one dangerous product.

In a similar way, when I talk about pharmaceutical drugs, I am talking about pharmaceutical drugs that we use under supervision. I am not talking about cocaine or heroin. They are two separate things. Both are called drugs, but I do not put them into the same basket.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be here today to speak on behalf of my fellow residents of Thetford Mines in this debate, which affects them more than the people in any other community in Canada.

The people of my region have lived with chrysotile every day for over 100 years. They work in a mine themselves, or they have worked there or they all have friends or family who have worked there. They have also been on the front lines in all of the battles surrounding chrysotile.

The workers in my region were the first to alert the world to the risks associated with the misuse of asbestos. Members will recall the asbestos strike in 1949. That is where it started. There is history and there is logic in all of this. Yes, there were dangerous conditions at that time, and yes, they have been refined. What we are talking about here is risk management. The toxicity of the product is not being questioned, as in the case of many other minerals and metals, but we are talking about risk management. That is the argument. I have heard nothing about that from the NDP today.

The workers in my region are also the ones who, with the employers and the governments of Quebec and Canada, helped to develop the approach to the safe and controlled use of chrysotile. That approach serves as a model throughout the world today, and it is a legacy of which my region is very proud. Unfortunately, that legacy has been tarnished today by all the disinformation campaigns conducted by pressure groups, groups that are often international and very highly organized. Today what we have is a battle that the workers have to fight, a battle against the disinformation campaigns designed to deprive them of an honest living and deprive our region of a source of considerable and perfectly legitimate prosperity. There is trade today at the global level, legally, and there is still demand, demand that I would mention in passing is growing. The machines we send into space could not return in complete safety without the use of this mineral. Those are the facts.

Business of Supply

Need I also point out that this production represents an export value of nearly \$100 million, or about 10% of world production? This courageous battle is being fought by the workers against great odds. It is too easy here in Ottawa to forget our regions and not hear them, as is proven by everything I have heard from the other side of the House since the day began. That is why I am proud to represent these workers today. They have a voice, a voice that sticks to the facts. That is why I am also proud to be part of a government that listens to the regions and cares about their development and their prosperity. As I said, the same certainly cannot be said about the NDP.

If there is a natural resources project that brings jobs and opportunities to a rural community, the NDP does everything it can to close it down, deny that though it will. This is a very disturbing trend, and one that is on a steady upswing. In Quebec, they talk about chrysotile. In Ontario, they talk about mining in the northern forests. In the territories, it is mines again. In Saskatchewan, it is uranium. In Alberta, it is the oil sands, and in British Columbia, it is oil pipelines. Have we often heard positive questions in the House about this? Never. It is always negative.

I will expand later on the many measures our government has taken for the development of our regions. But first I would like to set the record straight on a few points relating to chrysotile.

First, it is important to clarify the difference between chrysotile fibre and other asbestos fibres, something else I have not heard anything about in the House today. We know that the trade name “asbestos” is used to describe two distinct groups of natural mineral fibres that exist in rock formations around the world. First, there is amphibole, which is banned everywhere in the world, with good reason. It is a dangerous fibre because it is sharp. It also has dangerous repercussions on health, repercussions that, most importantly, are not manageable. Then there is serpentine fibre, which can be handled in a controlled and safe manner.

The word “asbestos” is therefore a generic term. Chrysotile is the only asbestos fibre that does not belong to the amphibole group, but rather to the serpentine group. It is part of the group that produces this natural mineral fibre.

The various types of fibres have different characteristics. The risks associated with the use of this natural fibre are manageable when proper control measures are applied, like the ones in place in Canada.

I want to point out that our approach, the controlled use of chrysotile fibres, is the same as the approach that we follow for any other important mineral or industrial product that may involve risks.

As well, we achieve this by applying appropriate regulations, and by adhering to precise programs and practices. Exposure to chrysotile is subject to stringent monitoring, and so it should be.

We impose federal, provincial and territorial restrictions on the exposure of workers to the product, and we prohibit certain specific industrial and consumer products under the Hazardous Products Act of Canada.

• (1630)

Chrysotile asbestos is not used in products for public use that may decompose or turn to dust and that may at the same time release asbestos particles into the air. That is clear. It has to be encapsulated.

When it is used in industrial applications, chrysotile is subject to stringent monitoring under the provisions on exposure limits set out in occupational health and safety legislation.

The position of the Government of Canada regarding chrysotile fibre has been known for a very long time. Our actions in this regard are responsible and transparent. We support the safe use of chrysotile, just as we support the safe use of many other products that may involve risks if they are mishandled. Again, we are talking about risk management here. The level of toxicity is not at issue here. We know that it can be toxic when mishandled or misused.

The Government of Canada does not ban substances found in nature. Rather, the government's policy is based on management of the risks presented by the products and practices that derive from those substances, at the right time and in the right place. This is a responsible approach. We have adopted measures to ensure that risks are kept to a minimum and are managed very rigorously.

The Government of Canada has advocated the controlled use of chrysotile since 1979. Chrysotile is governed by the Consumer Product Safety Act. The objective of the regulations is to prevent consumers being exposed to products that contain asbestos and in which the fibres can easily separate, be inhaled and have toxic effects on health. As well, we encourage importing countries to adopt measures to ensure the controlled use of chrysotile and products containing chrysotile. Chrysotile is a completely safe product if it is handled properly, as is the case for a host of products that may present risks under certain conditions. Responsible trade is central to Canadian values and the values of our government. As I said earlier, our government cares about the development of the regions of Quebec and Canada.

I would now like to talk about the measures we have taken in this regard. The mining industry is an economic engine in Canada and our regions. We are a land of natural resources. So it is entirely appropriate for us to exploit them in a proper and sustainable way. In 2010, mining and mineral processing contributed over \$40 billion to our gross domestic product and employed over 350,000 people. At the same time, the industry acknowledges the impacts its activities may have on our environment. In fact, the environmental performance of the mining industry has improved considerably in recent decades. In partnership with governments, it has demonstrated leadership in research and development, and efforts to that end must continue. It is therefore essential to adopt innovative technological solutions that will allow mineral products to be exploited sustainably and the value of those products, including chrysotile, to be increased.

In May 2009, Natural Resources Canada launched the green mining initiative, with the aim of finding ways to reduce the environmental impact of mining and contribute to improving the competitiveness of the Canadian mining sector in environmental terms. The program is based on a partnership composed of the mining industry, the federal, provincial and territorial governments, non-governmental organizations and academia.

Business of Supply

This initiative includes four pillars. First, it focuses on reducing the footprint of mining by finding methods to extract the maximum amount of minerals while leaving waste rock behind. We are also developing technologies to process these minerals and extract the metals in a more environmentally friendly way. For example, we are aiming to decrease greenhouse gases and energy consumption by working on developing hybrid underground vehicles. This prototype—the first of its kind in the world—was developed at our experimental mine in Val-d'Or, in collaboration with a Canadian manufacturer.

The second pillar is to innovate in waste management and treatment technologies, which will enable us to lower costs for maintaining mining sites and to have fewer mine closures. The third pillar is that we are looking at new approaches to improve mine closure and rehabilitation methods. The fourth pillar is that we are looking to better understand the tangible effects of mine waste on flora and fauna. The challenge is to leave the ecosystem in good health at the end of the production cycle. This initiative applies to all sectors of the mining industry, and chrysotile is no exception.

•(1635)

This is why, in Thetford Mines, we initiated a research project to look at the economic opportunities that mine waste can offer. The purpose of the project is to get an overview of the physical and chemical composition of waste at extraction sites. We will examine all of the documentation on the subject and will analyze samples of waste and nearby waters. The results will enable us to assess the chemical changes or stability of the waste when it is subject to erosion and water ingress, to identify mineral elements that could provide business opportunities and to examine sustainable extraction methods for the reprocessing of waste.

This project could eventually lead to secondary activities at the same sites. The region has worked hard in recent years to diversify its economic base, and our government has been a part of that. The project I just mentioned is an excellent example. Another example of our government's efforts is the recent announcement by the Prime Minister himself of an important project, the natural gas pipeline between Vallée-Jonction and Thetford Mines.

With this investment of over \$18 million, the government is supporting the construction of a \$24 million pipeline that will provide a source of safe, inexpensive energy—natural gas. The project will spur economic development and diversification in the region and the surrounding communities. It will allow companies to become more competitive and will encourage others to set up in the region, thereby contributing to creating wealth and jobs.

This contribution by the Government of Canada is an exceptional measure for diversifying the economic base of our region. I also want to mention the financial contributions totalling \$474,000 for setting up and operating two research centres located in Thetford Mines that are the pride of business people in the area. The Centre de technologie minérale et de plasturgie provides professional expertise in the plastics and minerals sectors. The Centre collégial de transfert de technologie en oléochimie industrielle offers businesses applied research services, technical assistance and information in the fields of synthetic organic chemistry and oleochemistry.

My constituents in Thetford Mines have worked hard to diversify our economy. Today, they can be proud of what they have accomplished and look toward the future. However, they will never accept that this diversification might be done to the detriment of the asbestos industry. They are not mutually exclusive. Asbestos is part of the history of my region, but it is also part of our present and our future.

The Thetford Mines region, like other regions in Quebec and Canada, knows that it can count on our government for support in its future development and in the appropriate and sustainable development of its natural resources. The region knows it can count on us for its diversification efforts as well. They are not mutually exclusive, as I was saying. It also knows it can count on a government that recognizes the importance of our natural resources to the economy of the country and of our regions, including the region of Thetford Mines.

•(1640)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Service Canada; the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge River, The Economy; the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's, The G8 Summit.

The hon. member for Nickel Belt.

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister.

He said in his speech that asbestos has been mined in Thetford Mines for over 100 years. I would like to know if he can tell us how many miners have died over the past 100 years because of asbestos. The Conservatives say that they have scientific evidence to prove that asbestos mining is not dangerous. I am wondering if the minister could table those documents so that we can consult them.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, this is a surprising question from a miner from a mining area. Clearly, he is stuck in the past. In the 1950s and 1960s, practices surrounding the use of asbestos were not appropriate, for example, asbestos spraying, which allowed fibres to float freely in the air. I am talking here about the safe use of asbestos, which has developed since 1979, where the fibre is encapsulated. The other practices are not safe and we no longer want anything to do with them. The number of airborne fibres compares favourably to that in a number of other sectors in the industry.

I am the Minister of Industry, not the Minister of Transport; I want to make that correction for the purpose of the transcript. I am sure the hon. member knows that there is also international pressure to ban nickel. We are in the same boat in that respect. I am not trying to compare mines or anything. The Government of Quebec has decided to operate chrysotile asbestos mines because it is possible to do so in a safe and controlled manner. We can share expertise. We will not be pressured by international regulations to impose an inappropriate ban.

Business of Supply

The hon. member for Nickel Belt must know that his region is facing the same pressure. Let us not confuse the issue. It is time to live in the present. I grew up in the Thetford Mines area and I do not need all ten fingers to count the number of people who have died from an occupational illness related to asbestos mining.

[*English*]

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened intently to the minister's speech and, from listening to comments made all day by members across, there is a hypocrisy that I would like him to comment on.

When the member for Outremont was a member of the national assembly, he actually voted to ensure that this was not a part of the Rotterdam Convention. Now that member is running for leader of the NDP.

The member for Toronto Centre, the current interim leader of the Liberal Party, said that with the new modern techniques of mining, this could be mined in a very safe way. Those are the comments that he made at a fundraiser in 2008.

I wonder if the minister could comment on some of the hypocrisy we are now hearing from the other side of the floor.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, when the member for Outremont was the minister of the environment in Quebec back in 2004, the national assembly took part in a vote on a unanimous motion from the Quebec government asking that chrysotile not be on the Rotterdam list. In 2006, the NDP made a commitment to its Quebec faction to ensure that chrysotile would not be listed on the Rotterdam Convention. They were against a ban and in favour of the safe use of that fibre.

The Liberal leader, back in 2009, put on the record that a ban would be ideological because it would be manageable. It is very curious to hear that today the opposition members have changed their minds. I do not know why.

I wonder why the 58 MPs from the Quebec caucus are supporting such a bizarre position since the Government of Quebec wants to extract its resources and share its expertise. The premier just put that on the record.

It is very surprising to see such a flip-flop.

• (1645)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I share a friendship with my colleague across the way, except on this. We have found our way to disagreement.

He was talking about members of the NDP and Liberals who have said some things contrary to their party's position. I will read something for my friend. It reads:

We should just list it. What isn't right is to ship something to some country and say, 'We won't tell you what's in this. Don't worry about it. The important thing to me is to tell people about the risk. ... It is demonstrably bad for you, this stuff.'

That was said by Chuck Strahl, who is also a friend. He sat in the Conservative cabinet for quite a while. He suffers from a very serious and grave illness due to exposure to asbestos. Is Chuck Strahl wrong or is it time to finally list this and tell people what it is that they are exposed to?

We need to put it on the package. We need to say what everybody knows: this is dangerous.

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that we have a good friendship, but on this point I do not agree with my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

What we are talking about today is a ban. We are not talking about Rotterdam. A ban would mean that the day we ban it, Canada would be out of business. There is a growing demand in the world, and we can share the responsible expertise that has been developed by our own workers here very seriously.

If we ban that natural substance, there will be a need for substitutes. There are projects for substitutes for which the biopersistence, most of which are longer than chrysotile.

There is a legitimate question to be asked that was never asked by the NDP. Does the NDP want to go with the false feeling of security in dealing with the mineral that has been the most studied one in the world? We accept that there is a toxicity level that we need to deal with but it is manageable. This is the irrationality of the position here. It is a risk-managed issue.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Transport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Natural Resources.

I would like to just say that Canadians are very fortunate to have someone who believes so passionately and is so effective in creating wealth and prosperity in a sustainable manner for Canadians.

I reflected on his opening comments about how members of the NDP seem to have a pattern of putting down our natural resource industries. On one hand, they claim to represent something in the environmental area or claim to support labour, when in fact their environmental policies would put a lot of union workers out of work. Or, they do not recognize the value that the natural resource industry has.

Canadians are very frustrated with the apparent hypocrisy of the NDP on all issues dealing with natural resources.

I wonder if the minister could elaborate on his vision for the natural resources industry in Canada and also point out why Canadians are so frustrated with the NDP's position on natural resources?

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, I share the member's frustration. We see that "never in my backyard" position from the NDP.

It will always go against natural resources projects. Members, like the members for Nickel Belt and Sudbury, have the same kinds of issue and must face international pressures about that.

Business of Supply

We are talking about a risk-managed issue. This is the idea here. Once the NDP is done with chrysotile, what will be next? That is the problem. The NDP will be all over the map and it will want to ban everything. As I said, we have natural resources projects everywhere in the country that we should be proud of. Now the NDP is standing up against Keystone XL, nuclear and everything. It means that we would have to shut down our country. We are a natural resources country. We must stand up for our natural resources and we need to develop it in a sustainable and appropriate way. This is what we are working toward.

•(1650)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I suppose it is with some anticipation but regret that I enter this debate, because I find it incredible that the government must be called to account again over such a fundamental choice, the choice before it and before us as Canadians, as to whether to support and prop up an industry that is, not to be too hyperbolic, dying a natural death.

The industry is not supported by the markets. As a government that believes in the magic of the invisible hand, the government continues to dump money into the asbestos industry. It does not do it for other mining companies or other products. I know this because I come from a district that does a great deal of mining.

The asbestos industry has somehow become the sacred cow for the government. To have to defend something like asbestos must make some in those benches feel great discomfort, because it puts in front of Canadians an aspect of profound and dangerous hypocrisy. There is not a Conservative who would want chrysotile or any other kind of asbestos put into their homes. Why not? It is because we do not allow it in this country. Why not? It is because we should not allow it in this country, yet the same Conservative members somehow find comfort in sending it overseas, where there are virtually no building codes and there is no ability to promise that there will be any safe or determined handling of it. Conservatives say, for some of the most crass and coarse political calculations possible, that they will continue to dump money into it and continue to turn a blind eye.

While the Conservatives are entitled to their own opinions, they are not entitled to their own facts. The facts of the matter are that according to every health organization in this country and around the world, there is no safe use of asbestos, full stop—not chrysotile, not white, not otherwise. It is a fact. We cannot find doctors who are actual doctors, as opposed to the shills that the asbestos lobby pops up every once in a while, the same guys who were used by the tobacco industry. I do not mean similar people; I mean the exact same experts with “doctor” in front of their names. We find out they are doctors of geography or theology, yet the industry props them up and says, “Doctor so-and-so says asbestos is safe”.

However, the fact is that as taxpayers we have spent millions of dollars taking asbestos out of our Parliament buildings. We cannot go into the West Block anymore, because we are taking asbestos out of those offices. Heaven forbid that any member of Parliament or senator or member of our staff would be exposed to a minute of

asbestos, but anyone happening to live in India, Indonesia or Sri Lanka who wants a trading relationship with Canada is going to get this stuff from Canada. Heaven forbid that we put even a warning label on the packages to tell them that the use of this material is seriously harmful for their health as workers. That is why union after union that is concerned with the health and safety of its members has stood up and said this is wrong. For many years this has been a struggle within the union movement.

One has to wonder, after all the years of debate around the safe use of tobacco, where the Conservatives would have stood on that question. They refuse to admit it as the evidence mounts from the Canadian Medical Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Québec Medical Association. One group of cancer experts after another has come forward and said unequivocally that there is no way to use asbestos in a way that will not eventually kill the people exposed. The Conservatives say, “Never mind; we are just going to put it in concrete. That will make it safe. It will be embedded in concrete so that no one gets exposed”. Obviously, in the developing world there are never natural disasters such as earthquakes, tsunamis, or floods that would break a building apart and then cause the asbestos to crack out of the concrete and be exposed.

At the heart of the debate and the motion we are moving today is the hypocrisy of the government in saying it cares a whit about workers' health and safety or at all about Canada's international reputation. Since 1984 we as taxpayers have pumped more than \$50 million into the asbestos lobby, for goodness' sake. All those Canadians out there are working hard and paying their taxes, and a bit of those taxes has been going to help promote asbestos exports from this country.

•(1655)

As we go out and campaign around this issue across the country, the first thing I find is that Canadians first have to be convinced that we are actually still exporting asbestos. In this modern day and age when we all know the dangers, they do not believe it.

If a newsletter was sent home from your kid's school that said, “We found asbestos in the school, but we're just going to leave it there”, all the parents in the country would be pulling their kids out of school the next day.

We have come to the realization that any exposure is bad. This is important: it is not that someone needs to be exposed to a great quantity of asbestos or to have that exposure happen over many decades; any single exposure has been proven to have the capacity to cause a debilitating form of cancer that essentially suffocates the victims to death.

It is the number one industrial killer in the world today, according to the World Health Organization, and these guys think that is okay. They think dragging Canada's reputation through the mud internationally, exposing workers the world over to this known carcinogen for the most narrow and crass of political considerations is okay. They are entitled to their opinions, but not their own facts.

Business of Supply

"Safe use of asbestos": can we put that sentence together? Let us try to rationalize that sentence to someone who is dying the slow and painful death that is related to asbestos. Let us tell them it was "safe use" that is killing them right now—that there were safe exposure limits that they were exposed to, and that it is somehow their fault that they are now dying. Let us tell that to the families and the widows I have spoken to, who cannot believe that in 2011 we even need to have this debate.

The government needs to hear this. All the members across can look down into their notebooks and iPads and not engage in this discussion and continue to read the prepared notes from the Prime Minister's Office, but I encourage them, I demand from them, to talk to the opposition and to find the just transition that would be the ethical thing to offer to these workers. If we are talking about jobs, the government is living in a false and invented world where somehow asbestos will be made good again and these workers will have work and be able to provide for their families, when we know that according to 2009 Quebec medical studies, the exposure rates around Thetford Mines and Asbestos are off the charts.

The minister can scoff, but he knows the facts, and the NDP has a long and proud tradition of supporting workers in this country. They can accuse us of a lot, but the idea of members of the Conservative Party getting up and somehow becoming champions of the union, of the working man and woman, and suggesting that the NDP is otherwise, is a bridge too far. What we have suggested and offered, and have gone into Thetford Mines and talked to the leaders there about, is that we must provide options and a just transition program.

I ask the minister to stop dumping money into the lobbyists. They do not need Canadian taxpayer-funded support to make their case. I am sure the Speaker would not want to give them any money either.

We learned as a society to pay attention to the medical expertise around tobacco. We learned there was not a safe exposure to tobacco for a young person and that it could not be handled safely if we let our kids have tobacco in order to retain jobs. Conservative members at the time would have been saying, "Well, this is about the economy, and anyone wanting to get kids to stop smoking hurts the Canadian economy. The Conservatives believe in the Canadian economy; therefore, our kids should be smoking".

What industry is next, they ask? I reverse the question. If they think asbestos is fantastic, why not bring back smoking? "Let us start introducing it back into the schools", say the Conservatives.

There has to be a line in public policy where we understand that the politics may be difficult, but we can get through them. We can offer the workers who are still in this industry a just transition.

• (1700)

I will end on this: I have many mines in my riding. They open and they close. The workers are not offered just transitions when the mine closes; the markets respond, and the mine shuts down. We are offering something particular and unique in this case: the idea that we must transition to something better, something that does not make the government the hypocrite that it is and does not continue to expose workers around the world to this known deadly product.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is refreshing to hear an NDP member speak about the virtues of the market.

As for the limits that he just mentioned, it is unfortunate that we are having this kind of debate. I do not have dust on my coat and I invite him to see for himself all the things that are being done on the ground.

The members for Compton—Stanstead, Sherbrooke and Drummond are not here. Will they intervene in the debate? I know the member for Richmond—Arthabaska will, but will the others?

Also, we are now comparing the safe use of asbestos chrysotile with smoking, which is total nonsense. As well, use of chrysotile asbestos is growing in the world; if it is banned, what would he see being used as a substitute, perhaps with higher bio-persistence? How can he assure people about substitutes when we do not have any idea about them? It is kind of irresponsible, and I would like to hear his views on that.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I have some experience with this argument because I introduced a private member's bill in a previous Parliament to ban a certain type of chemical in plastics, a softener that was an endocrine disrupter and a known carcinogen. As it moved through Parliament, the government raised the same issues, as did industry. They said there were no good replacements. Government members said there were no known replacements and that any replacement they could find would be very expensive. This is exactly how industry, which is being targeted for exposing people to risky products, always responds. It is the same argument in reverse that the tobacco industry used for years. It asked for proof that smoking gave people cancer, said it could not be done, and said it would provide experts who would say otherwise.

Of course, industry is going to defend itself to the nth degree, because that is what it does, but the role of government is to defend the rights and interests of Canadians and, as a further extension, to stop promoting the use of something that we know kills people and at the very least to slap a label on it that says it is dangerous. To suggest asbestos is not dangerous while neither the minister himself nor any of his colleagues will put it in their homes is what we call hypocrisy. We must do better than this, and we can.

[Translation]

That is true.

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[English]

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we keep hearing from the other side of the House that the NDP does not know what it is talking about, but I have here a list of doctors. It includes Dr. Turcotte from Quebec, Dr. Auger from Quebec, Dr. Last from Ottawa, Dr. Gosselin from Quebec, Dr. Bustinza from Quebec, Dr. Byers, Dr. Brophy. The list goes on and on. Can the hon. member tell me if it is only the Conservatives and members of the Flat Earth Society who do not believe that asbestos is dangerous?

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, this is the danger when an ideology is overrun: there is no capacity for a government to listen to reason and fact. It is not just the doctors listed by my hon. colleague, but the associations that they belong to and represent, which are many more health experts in the field from within Quebec and from without, across the rest of the country and around the world.

One cannot get a doctor who deals with cancer every day to suggest that exposure to asbestos is a good idea for anybody. Such a doctor cannot be found, other than the shills who were brought out during the tobacco industry debates. Those folks should have their licences ripped away, as far as I am concerned.

Part of the Hippocratic oath is “do no harm”. Government ministers should take a similar oath when they enter into cabinet. They should do no harm and stop propping up the industry, stop giving the industry taxpayers' money and allow the labelling and ban of asbestos to finally come to full and outright completion, because it is wrong, and the government must understand that it is wrong.

•(1705)

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have been waiting patiently for the opposition to talk about the fourth item in its motion, which says it wants the government to:

introduce measures dedicated to affected older workers, through the employment insurance program, to assure them of a decent standard of living until retirement

I notice it did not say “after” retirement.

We are talking about asbestos. I can hardly wait to hear the member's comments on this item in the motion.

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, it shows a profound lack of knowledge of the employment insurance program because it does not go beyond retirement, but I take my colleague's point.

The \$50 million we have already socked into this industry might be better spent just paying people not to go to work. I would be much better for their health and the health of the planet if we just simply took the money we have dumped into the lobbyists pockets and into the pockets of lawyers who fight this thing at Rotterdam and every convention.

The government has finally been exposed because even India, Ukraine and other countries that have been doing their government's dirty work at the Rotterdam Convention and preventing listing have said, “You're right, world, we should list this”, and only the Conservative government is ruining Canada's reputation by being the one opposing any listing and common sense.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley for so eloquently outlining some of the concerns that the NDP has with this continued mining and exporting of asbestos.

I also want to acknowledge the member for Nickel Belt for introducing the motion and the member for Winnipeg Centre, who has long been a tireless advocate in the House, speaking up about the dangers of asbestos mining and asbestos export.

I will not read the entire motion, but just a reminder we are calling for a ban on the use and export of all forms of asbestos and a just transition plan for asbestos producing workers and communities, a program for older workers that the member opposite mentioned, and an investment fund to encourage diversification.

Many people have spoken in the House about the dangers of mining and handling asbestos. We are talking about an industry in the province of Quebec that is focused on the export world. Although the fact that asbestos is banned in more than 50 countries, including most developed nations, Canada continues to be a leading producer and exporter of asbestos.

We export nearly 200,000 tonnes per year into poor and developing nations, making us the fourth largest exporter in the world and the lead promoter of asbestos in developing countries. Our primary customers for Canadian asbestos are Indonesia, India and the Philippines, where workers lack the most basic protections and safe working conditions.

In this debate Conservatives have criticized New Democrats because they claim that we are hard on resource industries. One would wonder where the responsibility lies. What is that numerical number? What is that dollar figure that says that we will not only jeopardize our workers in the industry, but we will also jeopardize the workers in other countries. Where is that number that says that is a responsible thing for Canadians to do.

I want to turn for a moment to an organization called Ban Asbestos Network of India, BANI. The people of that organization put out an article in March 2009. It says, “Ban on Indigenous Chrysotile Asbestos Mining Lifted”. This was talking about India. The article highlighted a number of concerned that it had been lobbying hard on its government.

The organization indicated that it had written letters, drawing urgent attention toward a serious unprecedent environmental and occupational health crisis with regard to an unnoticed asbestos epidemic in the country. Even if one asbestos fibre reaches the right place, it causes irreversible damage, leading to asbestosis, lung cancer or mesothelioma. Thirty deaths are caused per day from asbestos-related diseases, as per estimates based on U.S. and European studies.

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It drew attention to the order of Kerala State Human Rights Commission that ruled that exposing Indians to asbestos was a human rights violation. It goes on to say that it had requested the registrar of asbestos handlers and victims to develop a compensation fund and award people who had been exposed and suffered illness or subsequently death in their own country. It says:

How handicapped has our environmental regulatory bodies is best illustrated in the manner in which asbestos is allowed to be used in the country despite the fact that some 50 countries have banned it and even International Labour Organisation and World Health Organisation call for its elimination. Even World Trade Organisation upheld the right of the Europe to ban this incurable cancer causing killer fiber. In case of asbestos, a carcinogen...

Later on in the article it says:

When the world is preparing and planning to get rid of all forms of asbestos, it makes us look stupid in India to be still importing it and lifting the ban on chrysotile asbestos mining, we should devote our scarce resources to prevent the impending disaster by phasing it out as soon as we can. Safer substitute materials for white asbestos are available, they should be considered for us.

This is a cry from India, where hundreds of people have died because they are exposed to asbestos. As this article points out, even one fibre can have an adverse effect.

The World Health Organization says stop the use of asbestos, and this is from an article, "More Pressures on India to Ban Harmful Asbestos Use". It says:

•(1710)

The WHO estimates that about 125 million people in the world are exposed to asbestos at the workplace, and that over 107,000 people die each year from asbestos-related lung cancer...and asbestosis due to occupational exposure. In collaboration with other industries, the WHO works with countries to eliminate asbestos-related diseases. It recognizes that the most efficient means of doing so is to stop the use of all types of asbestos.

The same article says that the supreme court of India has already accepted the adverse affects of asbestos. In acknowledging the dangers of asbestos, the supreme court stated that "there can be no doubt that uncontrolled utilization of asbestos, in any form, can be hazardous to human health".

Referring to an earlier 1995 judgment that outlined strict guidelines for asbestos use, the court stated that it had already "accepted the well-established adverse effects of asbestos including the risk beyond the work place". Yet we are still actively seeking markets in India despite the fact that there is significant opposition in India to this Canadian industry.

Although this is a different kind of asbestos, I want to point out the fact that we have historically said that asbestos is fine, only to discover later on that it had such severe effects that whole families were almost wiped out. Six members of one family are now dead.

At one time the now vilified Zonolite insulation was the darling of the Canadian government. It even provided grants through the Canadian home insulation program to encourage Canadian homeowners to install Zonolite in their homes. The grants were offered from 1977 through 1984 and it is estimated that 200,000 to 300,000 Canadians took the government up on its offer and installed the now lethal substance. Does this sound familiar? The member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley talked about the fact that we used to support and promote smoking. We used to promote and support Zonolite and 200,000 to 300,000 Canadians ended up with it in their homes.

First nations families are living in homes that are asbestos contaminated and they have even less resources to deal with some of these problems. I am going to tell the House about a woman who lost six members of her family. The article states:

For the ThunderSky family, however, the problems started long before that.

That's because the Canadian government installed asbestos-tainted insulation in hundreds of first nations homes in the 1950s. That's where ThunderSky believes she and her doomed family were first exposed to the deadly asbestos that has cost the Canadian woman six members of her immediate family.

It goes on to say:

Mesothelioma and asbestos-related disease can lie dormant for decades before it emerges. To that end it is not uncommon for a worker in an asbestos-laden environment, or even a resident in a home outfitted with asbestos insulation, to go for 30 to 50 years before symptoms finally emerge.

Asbestos is literally a ticking time bomb. Workers who continue to work in the field are continually exposed to it. Some members pointed out earlier that not only were miners exposed to asbestos, but their families were as well. We have heard stories about how wives and children, because largely the miners are men, have died of asbestos-related cancers even though they never worked one day in the mines.

If we are truly concerned about the health and vitality of workers in our country, if we are truly concerned about the health and well-being of their communities, then we will look for ways to support a just transition out of those industries.

A member opposite talked about hearing what we would do for older workers. There used to be a good government program for older workers called POWA, or program for older worker adjustment. When an industry was in transition, the program would provide pension bridging for workers of a certain age so they could retire in dignity.

I have a long list of organizations that have talked about the dangers of mining asbestos and using it, but unfortunately, I do not have enough time to read them. However, many organizations in countries throughout the world say that asbestos is not safe in any form.

I urge all members of the House to support the motion put forward by the member for Nickel Belt.

•(1715)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that the NDP decided to condemn that fibre. The NDP does not make any difference in the time it uses and the fibre itself. The NDP speaks about Zonolite and amphibole. Amphibole has been banned. The NDP speaks about uses from decades ago. When we speak about the West Block, this was used decades ago. Now we are talking about safe use of the chrysotile fibre. That means it has to be encapsulated. This is a safe-use policy that has been developed through the years.

Starting from that assumption, has the member consulted with the member for Compton—Stanstead, who was born and grew up in the asbestos area in Windsor, Quebec, as to why the member is not intervening here?

Business of Supply

[*Translation*]

Did the member consult her colleague from Compton—Stanstead, who was born in Asbestos and grew up in Windsor, Quebec, in the Asbestos region? Does that member agree that his party does not believe that safe use is possible? As for toxicity, we know that it is toxic. It is a question of risk management. Have they consulted anyone about this?

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, there are really two issues here. One is the mining of asbestos and the other is the export into countries where there are not safe practices to protect workers.

As far as the minister is concerned, it is fine to mine a product here, which he claims is mined safely, and there are many dissenting opinions on that. Even if we could buy that argument, he is saying that it is absolutely okay to export it to developing countries where those workers have no protection.

It would seem to me that Canada needs to take some responsibility for the end use of its product. At a minimum, the government could have signed on to the Rotterdam Convention, but chose to block it in every way possible.

I simply do not buy the argument that we cannot disassociate the mining of this product from the end use. A responsible government would take a look at what the rest of the world is saying about this and sign on to the Rotterdam Convention.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her speech. It was very informative.

The use of asbestos in Canada is tightly regulated by Canada's Hazardous Products Act. Yet the member for Mégantic—L'Érable said that chrysotile fibres can be used safely. I am trying to understand this better. I would also like to know what my colleague thinks of the fact that Canada has not signed the Rotterdam Convention and how much this affects the use of chrysotile fibres in the developing world. It can be very unsafe and dangerous for the people of other countries.

• (1720)

[*English*]

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, the member raises a very good point around that. Many of us come from resource-based communities. Of course we want industry in our communities. However, we also want the workers in those industries to be safe. We want them to be safe and we want to take some responsibility for where those end products line up and where workers do not have the kind of hazard management practices and safe practices in the workplace. The government's failure to support the Rotterdam Convention is so it does not have to take any responsibility for that end use, so it can continue to claim the product is safe, so it can continue not to have the product labelled for the kind of hazard it actually is, putting those workers at risk in other countries.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Richmond—Arthabaska.

As the House knows, the policy of the Canadian government with regard to mining and use of chrysotile is very clear. For more than 30 years Canada has promoted the safe and controlled use of chrysotile both nationally and internationally. It has been the position of successive federal governments, both Conservative and Liberal. It has been the position of successive Quebec governments, both Liberal and Parti Québécois. It continues to be the same position of the Charest government as it was in 2004 when the NDP member for Outremont voted against the inclusion of chrysotile in the Rotterdam Convention.

That is an important point. The development of natural resources is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. Banning the mining of any natural resource is an intrusion into provincial jurisdiction, and as such I will oppose this motion.

I would like to focus on the part of the motion that deals with worker retraining and older workers.

As the House knows, our government has taken significant steps to ensure older workers are put in the best position to succeed should they ever lose their job. It is interesting that the NDP has included a clause on worker retraining in this motion because, whenever our government has put forward measures for older workers, each and every time the NDP has voted against them, so the NDP probably cannot be trusted this time either.

Canadians know that when our government puts forward a plan, we deliver. Canadians know our focus has remained on economic growth and getting Canadians jobs. Key actions taken by this government specifically through our economic action plan have played a key role in steering the economic recovery from the deepest global recession since the 1930s. As a result of our quick and decisive measures, almost 656,000 jobs have been created since the depths of the recession in July 2009, the strongest employment growth in the G7.

We also continue to demonstrate strong economic stewardship as we wind down many of the temporary stimulus measures and take additional steps to secure the recovery.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan announced earlier this year is to ensure Canadians remain on the right track for economic growth and jobs. Part of these measures is an awareness that we need to help workers who are in transition. This is where we are working closely with provinces and territories to equip Canadians with skills so they can take advantage of opportunities and achieve self-sufficiency. We are also providing targeted supports to those facing particular barriers to entering the workforce.

This government has acted to invest in Canadians. Each year we provide almost \$2.5 billion to provinces and territories so they can deliver critical services and supports to Canadian workers needing help transitioning to new jobs.

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Let us first focus on some of the help we provide under the employment insurance plan. In addition to the billions of dollars we provide in necessary income support to unemployed Canadians, we also provide provinces and territories close to \$2 billion per year through labour market development agreements so they can provide training and employment programs for individuals eligible for EI. Through the labour market development agreements with the provinces and territories, about 600,000 workers across the country are getting training and employment support each and every year. Of these, over 100,000 are Canadians over the age of 50.

We are focusing on retraining workers so they have the skills to get good jobs in the growth industries of the 21st century. These include industries such as information and communications technology, biotechnology, energy, natural resources and environmental technology. We also provide \$500 million each year to further support provincial and territorial initiatives that help meet the training needs of Canadians who are not eligible for employment insurance. This funding is provided through our labour market agreements, LMAs. LMA-funded training is particularly important for under-represented groups in the labour market including but not limited to older workers, people with disabilities, and employed individuals who have low levels of literacy and essential skills.

• (1725)

In fact, in the first two years of these agreements close to 550,000 individuals were served. No Canadian must be left behind is the watch phrase of our government. We are committed to being inclusive in building a prosperous Canada, and the funding that we provide to provinces and territories demonstrates this well.

I would also like to mention a third program through which our government is helping workers in transition, the targeted initiative for older workers. We know older workers are key to helping us meet the demographic challenge. Their experience and knowledge are valuable in the workplace. However, unemployed older workers face unique challenges in reintegrating into the workforce. That is why we introduced the targeted initiative for older workers, TIOW.

TIOW is a federal, provincial, territorial cost-shared initiative that provides employment supports to unemployed older workers living in vulnerable communities affected by high unemployment and/or significant downsizing or closures. Through TIOW projects, older workers are offered a combination of activities, including job search, skills training, and work experience. Let me emphasize that our support for older workers has complemented the labour market agreements with the provinces. We are well aware of the success of TIOW—

Mr. Nathan Cullen: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I am loath to interrupt my friend midstream, but I have been trying to understand what this has to do with a ban on the export of chrysotile asbestos. He has talked about older worker transition programs. He has spoken about the government's now ended economic action plan.

I have been listening intently for a reference back to asbestos. If the member is suggesting in his comments that he is talking about transition programs for asbestos workers, I am all ears, but I have not heard anything about the topic at hand.

The previous Speaker has ruled on this a number of times and encouraged government members to get off the PMO notes and back onto the topic. I would encourage my friend to do the same.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Members know it is important to keep the topic of the presentation relevant to the subject at hand. Members are given a broad berth in order to make their points and bring that relevance in terms of their speech, as the case may be. I am sure that the hon. member was coming to how this would connect with the topic of the day.

On the same point, the Minister of Industry.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis: Mr. Speaker, I invite my colleague from Skeena—Bulkley Valley to reread the motion. The motion also proposes measures for economic diversification. I do not want to hear anyone trying to divide the motion in order to lead the debate in another direction. My colleague is free to debate the entire motion and I say this with all due respect.

• (1730)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): That essentially reinforces the point that was made earlier. Again, members are given the ability to make these points and may use considerable explanation to come to how this would be relevant to the motion in front of us.

The hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted, I would refer that member to paragraph (c) of his motion. Maybe that would clarify the issue.

Let me emphasize that our support for older workers has really complemented the labour market agreements with the provinces. We are well aware of the success of TIOW and so are others. Just ask the more than 16,000 older workers who have participated so far. TIOW is a striking example of co-operation within the federal system. Our commitment to older workers stands firm.

Canada's economic action plan introduced in 2009 included time limited targeted investments to address immediate needs during the economic global recession. These investments have made a strong and positive impact, and have helped propel us through the recovery.

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Maintaining attachment to the workforce was our primary objective, and due to the success in helping Canadians, funding has increased for LMDAs, LMAs and TIOW. We transferred an additional \$1 billion over two years to expand support for skills upgrading for EI eligible workers through the labour market development agreements.

We provided \$500 million for a two-year period under the strategic training and transition fund with the goal of helping workers retrain to stay employed or transition to new jobs. This funding was delivered through the labour market agreements. We also provided an additional \$60 million over three years.

We work with the provinces to ensure programs are in place to help local economies succeed. When they do not succeed, we help workers transition to new employment.

What we do not do is tell them whether or not to mine their natural resources. That is their choice. Instead, we work from the health, safety and environmental perspective to ensure that best practices are employed. As it relates to chrysotile, that formula has been in place for 30 years.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that my colleague brought that speech around to a discussion on natural resources.

He said that the federal government does not interfere with the choice of natural resources, but quite clearly for the last five years the Conservative government has provided funding to an agency that actually promotes the sale of this product in other countries. To somehow suggest that the federal government is removed from the process of selling chrysotile asbestos in other countries is wrong. The federal government is a full-size partner in the sale of these resources to countries where standards are not in any way equal to Canadian working standards.

How can my colleague say that the federal government is separated from the provinces on the disposition of chrysotile asbestos?

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, the mining of natural resources is under provincial jurisdiction. He knows that as well as I do. He is from one of territories and should be well aware of that. I am sure there is a lot of mining there. I do not think his territory would want the federal government interfering in which mines go forward and which do not.

The NDP has a paragraph in its motion regarding training for workers. Is it not a bit of a hypocrisy when any time we put money into training that party always votes against it? I find that to be quite interesting.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the remarks by my colleague from Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, and I congratulate him. I believe he has taken a position that is in keeping with that of our government, namely that we do not interfere in areas of provincial jurisdiction when it comes to the extraction, processing and use of natural resources.

The same goes for agriculture, for example, where we support supply management. Frankly, the NDP does not have a position on that.

Today's debate once again demonstrates that the NDP has taken a position that is counter to the interests of our regions by advocating the elitist policies of its leadership. This position is completely out of sync with the prevailing view in Canada, a country rich in natural resources.

I would like to hear what my colleague has to say about that.

• (1735)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for the question.

[*English*]

I would love to elaborate on how the NDP obviously is not fit to govern this great country.

Here we have a province that has some jurisdiction over a particular sector of the economy and those folks would have us go in, do whatever, and pick the winners and the losers. That is not the way a federal government should operate.

A federal government is there to support the provinces in their direction. One province may choose to go one way and another province may choose to go another way. We are there to support that. We are not supposed to get involved in provincial jurisdictions.

I agree with the minister that the NDP official opposition certainly is not ready for prime time.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a study conducted in 2009 concluded that the concentration of asbestos in outdoor air in Thetford Mines was 215 times higher than levels in samples taken throughout the United States and that the number of deaths caused by lung cancer and mesothelioma is 17 times higher there than in the general population.

The motion moved today proposes the creation of an investment fund for economic diversification in regions that produce asbestos, in order to help mine workers find other employment and improve their health.

I would like to ask my distinguished colleague opposite if he would like to help miners by supporting our motion, which would reduce health risks for people working in asbestos mines and result in regional economic diversification.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for the question. I must say, as I said earlier, this is a matter of provincial jurisdiction. That question must be put to the province. If the provincial government thinks the mines are dangerous, it simply has to stop production. It is a matter of provincial jurisdiction.

Mr. André Bellavance (Richmond—Arthabaska, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member who just spoke for sharing his time with me today. Of course, this matter is very important to me, considering that the town of Asbestos and the Jeffrey mine are right in the middle of my riding. I am sure you have heard a whole litany of arguments today from the NDP, the party that moved this opposition motion. Of course, they talked about the issue of chrysotile in a very demagogic, negative way.

Ever since I was elected—I may be exaggerating to say every day, but perhaps nearly every week—the member for Winnipeg Centre has been rising in this House to present petitions and make comments. Clearly, he has parliamentary immunity when he talks about serial killers and criminals. I do not want to repeat those kinds of comments here today. In the past I have had a habit of becoming angry when talking about this issue. Today I have decided to remain positive. This may come as a surprise to some of my colleagues, although I am really a very friendly, cheerful guy.

So, today, I would like to speak about this issue in a positive light simply because, in Quebec, there is a very interesting underground mining project. As hon. members are aware, Asbestos has suffered many negative effects as a result of the difficulties experienced by the mine. Then, Magnolia Metallurgy opened a plant to produce magnesium, and invested \$1 billion in the area of Asbestos. This project lasted about a year and a half and created excellent jobs that benefited the community and offered high salaries. These jobs in the area were lost.

Clearly, the region of Asbestos is pursuing economic diversification. It is important to say it. Nevertheless, this underground mining project is very important in terms of job creation—between 400 and 500 jobs. That is a significant number. The Asbestos mine currently employs between 350 and 400 people. All in all, the mines in Asbestos and Thetford Mines employ about 1,000 people. There are also approximately 1,500 indirect jobs. We are talking about a payroll and benefits of approximately \$35 million. For the town of Asbestos, a community that has had so much difficulty, this is a pivotal moment.

I know that an NDP member made a speech today and gave the history. As the hon. members know, we are talking about strikes and all the battles that the workers fought for their health, particularly in Asbestos, and also in Thetford Mines. Today, this has been a recurrent theme among many of the members of the NDP, the party that presented this motion. They have spoken of people's health, not just the miners but also the other people who live in the area. They told all sorts of what practically seem like legends about people's health.

Did the hon. members know that Asbestos has the third oldest population in Quebec? When I am out in public, with my riding association or anywhere, I talk to people—people I know, friends who live in Asbestos and who are seniors. Some of them worked in the mine for 35 or 40 years. Not everyone is going to die because they worked in the mine.

However, in the beginning, in the 1950s and the 1960s, it truly was hazardous. It is not for nothing that the workers and the unions fought for their health and for their rights. No one is saying it is not hazardous, but they were extracting amphiboles. A geologist not far

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from here, at the University of Ottawa, has already clearly demonstrated, when responding to doctors, that there are different types of asbestos. We cannot lump them all in the same category. There are at least half a dozen different types of asbestos.

Amphiboles used to be used for insulating homes. We often talk about the West Block here and say that MPs do not want to live in asbestos. It was used back then because it makes an excellent firewall. Obviously when it gets into the air, then it becomes a problem. If it gets into a person's lungs, it can be quite harmful and the effects can last for a very long time. The person can eventually develop cancer.

Today we are no longer mining amphibole asbestos because it is banned. We use chrysotile, chrysotile cement, in most cases. We also often hear that in the United States or in the Americas, they are no longer allowed to use asbestos and chrysotile, they only export asbestos. In the United States alone, they use chrysotile in a number of areas, including in the automobile industry for brakes and automatic transmissions. Today, they also make clothing, pipeline wrappings, roofing and slate tiles with chrysotile.

•(1740)

This is still the case everywhere and it is one of the safest and most durable products. Why is it used a great deal in developing countries? Because they are developing, and so they are often in the process of building water systems. There is a very big difference, in terms of quality and health for the people of those countries, between a metal pipe that will rust and cause health problems for the people receiving that water and a pipe made of chrysotile cement.

We must clarify the issue. There is also a great deal of misinformation about this. André Lalonde, a mineralogist and dean of the Faculty of Science at the University of Ottawa, clearly explained the difference between the products in an article that appeared in *Le Soleil* in 2010. This is a fairly recent article in which Mr. Lalonde said:

Historically, doctors have misunderstood asbestos. We cannot blame them, since they did not study mineralogy...[however,] all of these minerals have different chemical formulae and crystalline structures. The proof that [the misunderstanding] is still present today is that people still talk about asbestos instead of talking about amphibole or chrysotile.

You need to be a geologist to understand him. I am not a geologist. However, as the town of Asbestos and the Musée minéralogique d'Asbestos are in the centre of my riding, I know a little bit more about all the types of asbestos in the world. I believe that there is also a museum of mineralogy in Thetford Mines, but that is in the riding of the Minister of Industry.

Every day, everyone, all the MPs who spoke today, will breathe asbestos in this building or outdoors. This natural resource is found in the ground everywhere. I went to a small island in my riding, which is far away from Asbestos, and there was asbestos in the ground. The people I went to visit, who are not very young and have a small cottage on this island, are the picture of health today. Asbestos is found in its natural state almost everywhere.

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You have to visit a mine, whether it be Asbestos in my riding or Thetford Mines in the Minister of Industry's riding, to understand how well the workers have done their job. Obviously, they do not want to die. Members of the family of workers at the Jeffrey mine in my riding had health problems at the time, because of what was happening. Today, occupational safety standards are extremely high. I went to visit the mine and I would have no problem staying there for a few hours and breathing the air that comes from the mine and from the place where the workers work. As well, the air is checked, but not every day. There is a laboratory, a place in the mine where people are paid solely to monitor the ambient air and make sure that the rate is safe for the workers.

There are several new NDP members. I want to remind them that not so long ago, all parties in the House were in favour of the safe use of chrysotile; everyone understood it. In 2005, I tabled a report from the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade in the House. The committee was unanimous; all parties agreed that Canada should continue to promote the safe use of chrysotile. That was not so many moons ago. It was in 2005, when I was elected.

The government was asked to adopt a national chrysotile policy based on the research, promotion and safe use of this product. The NDP voted for that. Second, the Government of Canada was asked to conduct a comparative study on the "hazardous nature" of replacement fibres and chrysotile. The NDP voted for that. And third, the Government of Canada was asked to organize a public education campaign on chrysotile and, in so doing, promote the safe use of this product domestically and internationally, and encourage its own use of chrysotile. The NDP and all parties in the House voted for that.

●(1745)

Obviously, therefore, I am going to vote against banning asbestos.

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Industry and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to bring two points to my colleague's attention to hear what he has to say about them.

First, during question period today, we heard the member for Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup ask a question indicating that, with its safe use policy, the government is protecting corporations at the expense of workers and users.

Second, we heard the member for Newton—North Delta explain that in the 1970s, she lived near Thetford Mines and would find asbestos fibres in the snow when she was having snowball fights. God knows that there is a lot of snow in Thetford, but she found that appalling. So that is the debate we are having here today, which I personally find appalling. I would like to hear what the member for Richmond—Arthabaska has to say about this.

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his comments.

I talked about myths related to chrysotile. First, we must stop being paternalistic with workers. Back home, Jeffrey mine workers are unionized with the CSD. It is in our community, in Asbestos, that there was a strike that left its mark on Quebec history, and workers do not want to be told that we feel sorry for them and that they are

sick. One should go and see them. One should go to their workplace to see that, when the Government of Canada, like the Quebec government, protects this industry, workers do not want to be told that they will lose their jobs and that they will get paid by the government, because they know there is a way to use chrysotile safely. However, this does not mean there are not places where it is not used properly, as can be the case with other products.

As for snowballs, I remind the Minister of Industry, who lives in Thetford Mines, that he himself looks pretty healthy. Surely he must have thrown some snowballs when he was young, yet he does not seem to be suffering because of it now.

●(1750)

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP): Mr. Speaker, earlier, the Bloc Québécois member said that people who used to work with asbestos do not all die of cancer caused by it. He is right in that respect, just as smokers do not all die from lung cancer. Earlier, I read a list of Quebec doctors who agree with us that asbestos should be banned.

Could the hon. Bloc Québécois member tell me whether all these doctors are mistaken? No doctor in Quebec knows anything about this? My list did not refer to doctors in geography. I was talking about medical doctors, about scientists. Are all medical doctors in Quebec mistaken?

Mr. André Bellavance: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I am aware of that. That is why, earlier in my speech, I made a distinction between amphiboles and the various types of asbestos. That is why I quoted André Lalonde, who is a mineralogist and an ore expert. He is not a health specialist but a rock expert. Medical doctors cannot claim to be rock experts. That is what I said earlier.

There are various types of asbestos. We cannot lump them all together and say that this is asbestos, that there is no difference, because that is not true. Amphiboles are now banned. They can no longer be used. Chrysotile is the fibre now being used.

The U.S. Department of Health has made a list of hazardous products. I do not know whether there are any nickel mines in the member's riding, but there are in certain ridings and I know that a huge nickel mine is being planned in the Abitibi region. According to the U.S. Department of Health, nickel is much more toxic than chrysotile, because it ranks 53rd on its list, while chrysotile ranks 119th.

I could provide similar examples, such as lead, uranium, benzene and so on. There are many other products that we produce, export and send abroad, yet I have not heard the NDP speak against them.

[English]

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île.

I thank the members for Nickel Belt and Winnipeg Centre for tabling this motion.

I am especially glad to join in this debate today as this is an issue that I carry with me daily. A good friend of mine from the Mission, also known as Michipicoten Village in Wawa, Ontario, is currently struggling as her husband is battling mesothelioma, which many know is a type of cancer that can develop after being exposed to asbestos. I can say that this has been a battle that is defined more by questions than it is by answers. Watching these good people go through their search for appropriate care and treatment was a real eye-opener. I would never wish that on anyone and I certainly cannot support Canada exporting the root cause of their misery to other countries, which is what motivates me as I speak to this now.

In Canada, we understand how dangerous asbestos is. We have, for years, mitigated against the worst effects of this substance and sought to replace it when we know it has been used in homes and public buildings. We are a well-to-do western country with more than our share of resources, knowledge and, most important, public safety standards. However, the substance that we casually export is highly controlled here under the Hazardous Products Act. In fact, it is banned outright in 50 countries, including most developed countries, but we are supposed to believe that developing nations will manage to do an adequate job of utilizing this unique material and protecting those who work with it or, worse, do not much care what happens to people in other countries once we get payment.

It does not sound like the compassionate Canada that so many people have an image of, because it is not. We have recently witnessed the Canadian asbestos industry attempting to rehabilitate the substance in the public's eye, with the ultimate goal being government assistance to export even more of this dangerous product. The industry has gone so far as to misrepresent the World Health Organization's opinion on chrysotile asbestos, only to receive a strongly worded clarification from that governing body. It is difficult to comprehend.

As I watch my friends chase treatments and deal with bureaucracy, I can only imagine the millions of people around the globe who are not as fortunate. I use that term in a somewhat ironic sense. I mean fortunate enough to at least have options and the ability to travel all over the country and into the United States chasing down experimental treatments, but only for those who have money. There is no doubt that asbestos is useful for many things but so are other carcinogens that we control, avoid or even legislate against.

We should think of how quickly we moved on bisphenol A, which is found in plastic products and has been linked to various health conditions, including cancer. In that instance, Canada was a world leader. When announcing the ban of bisphenol A, the Minister of Health called the move precautionary and prudent. We cannot say the same about our policy on chrysotile asbestos can we?

In fact, I have heard members from the government side talk today about the need to protect the mining industry in Canada, instead of addressing the asbestos issue. I must point out that is not what we are debating today and the argument was a bit like someone defending agriculture in a debate about heroin production. It goes to show how much work we need to do to get through to members on the government bench.

I listened this morning as the member for Sarnia—Lambton gave a good account of why cosmetic contact lenses should be regulated

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in Canada. The member asked parliamentarians to join together to support her bill and we are asking them to support our motion. In doing so, she claimed that Canada could reclaim the proper regulatory powers over the importers of contact lenses who so callously flood the Canadian market while doing untold damage to thousands of young Canadians' eyes, completely unbeknown to most consumers, unfortunately.

I cannot help but see the parallel between these debates today. The only difference is that, in this case, Canada is willing to look past health and safety. The government is totally invested in asbestos exports and is blocking international efforts to list asbestos on the UN's list of hazardous substances. It is fair to say that we should have the courage of our convictions for exports as well as imports.

• (1755)

I have received a fair bit of correspondence on this issue. In one message, I was alerted to a victims' group in the UK that had written to our Minister of Health in January 2010. It wrote asking her to ban asbestos and to better monitor the epidemic of asbestos-related diseases in Canada. The group did receive a reply but not from the Minister of Health. Instead, it heard from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, if we can believe that, who defended our asbestos exports. He told the group that Canada would continue to advocate for chrysotile under controlled conditions by contributing \$250,000 per year to the Chrysotile Institute, which was formerly called the Asbestos Institute.

We know that the asbestos industry has received 50 million in taxpayer dollars from Canada and Quebec since 1984. This is to promote a product that is so dangerous that West Block, one of the parliamentary buildings, had to be closed every time there was an incident that potentially shook fibres loose from the structure. The building is now closed for renovations, not the least of which is to remove altogether the asbestos that riddles the structure. It was built at a time when asbestos was seen as most beneficial. Today, we know better.

We need to ask ourselves a very pointed question here. If the members of Parliament of Canada were unwilling to work in an environment that was susceptible to trace elements of asbestos, how can we ask workers in India and Indonesia to expose themselves in what will likely be more dangerous environments? It is a fair question and one that I encourage the members who are still in support of asbestos exports to ask themselves.

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This brings us back to the motion we are debating today. It calls for a ban on the use and export of all forms of asbestos and a just transition plan for asbestos-producing workers and communities. It would be difficult, and we acknowledge as much, but it would not be anywhere as significant a shock as it would have been a few decades back. There just are not as many workers in the industry anymore. I will give some numbers. In 1991, 1,000 workers were employed in the asbestos mines in Quebec. Today, only 350 people work three to four months a year at Thetford Mines, which is also under bankruptcy protection and slated to close its gates this month.

This motion is not ill-conceived and New Democrats are acutely aware of the economic impact that banning exports would have. Many of my colleagues have spoken to that. We do not imagine that there would not be capital required for work force adjustment. We must be prepared to retain or relocate those miners who would be able to move on to other types of work and also be prepared to help workers who are closer to retirement, as well as the communities that would be affected by a change in direction as we are debating. It is the majority of the motion we are debating today and, as we see from the numbers I just cited, much of the adjustment in the work force historically associated with this industry has already taken place.

I am no stranger to this phenomenon. I know first-hand what happens when the mine closes and a town is forced to consider its future. That is the story of Elliot Lake. It is also the story of my family. The towns in Quebec that are reliant on asbestos can take heart from the way Elliot Lake has managed to reinvent itself in the aftermath of a large operation closure. There were hiccups but the town is known today as a retirement destination. The population is different. Some miners moved to other operations. Some stayed. Some are returning. However, at the end of the day, the sky did not fall and the town carried on.

For the families involved, there would be other work. Some would move to remain in mining and some would find other work. In the big picture, we need to recognize our position in the world and be aware that we are able to do something about this indiscriminate killer. With a simple change in policy, Canada would be able to reduce our role in millions of deaths worldwide. We have the riches needed to make a smooth transition for individuals and communities that would be affected by such a large change.

Members have heard all day that asbestos claims an estimated 100,000 lives around the world every year.

• (1800)

[Translation]

The World Health Organization has indicated that between 5 million and 10 million people will die from asbestos-related illnesses. That is a shame, and it is in large part Canada's shame. Canada must recognize its role in this tragedy and take some responsibility. We could certainly do worse than simply adopting this motion.

[English]

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, throughout the day, I found myself wondering why we value some human lives so much more than others. We gathered in this place, all of us united, to focus on the threat to Coptic Christians who are being persecuted in Egypt. We went to war under a doctrine called

"responsibility to protect". We saw 29 Coptic Christians murdered recently, and we rightly object. We see people at risk of dictators, and we rightly object.

Is it because the 100,000 people annually who are killed by asbestos are nameless to us that we will sell this poison globally? Is that why we do not care, in this country, to end this trade?

I would be grateful for the member's thoughts.

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, at the end of the day, I think the government of the day is not putting faces to the victims, which is extremely sad.

My friend writes me often to update me on her husband's case. They are tuned in right now. Julius' fight is our fight. He and his wife want to ensure that others need not go through what they have gone through, attempting to seek treatment and having the door closed on them. They also want to ensure that the government stops exposing workers to this deadly substance. Martina is tireless in her attempts to get Julius the best care possible. It is a difficult task and she is well aware of the way the conditions play out, barring a miracle.

I just want to leave members with a couple of words as they consider their position on this motion. I truly hope that the members on the government side are listening, because they will not hear a better plea, at least in my opinion, than this.

• (1805)

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the history of the Parliament with this issue has been one of movement. We have seen over the last six years that we have gone from where a vote in 2006 against the Chrysotile Institute had 10 supporters in the whole House of Commons, to a point now where I think the vast majority of people in this room recognize that we are not on the right track here. This is not a huge industry.

Would my colleague perhaps comment on how we are moving in that direction and that the government should recognize that and should respond in an appropriate fashion, not in the way that it responded quite recently on the international scene by being the odd person out on the whole issue of this?

Mrs. Carol Hughes: Mr. Speaker, my colleague is absolutely right. There used to be a very few people who were onto this in the organization against the asbestos but now that number has grown by thousands, given the fact that 60% of all work-related deaths in Canada are related to asbestos exposure and, get this, a staggering 84% in Quebec. This is why we need to act.

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Just to add to that, I want give a bit more information I received in the message from my friend. She says, that "Canada is responsible for most of the deaths. Dying from cancer is a very frightening experience for the whole family and we can say today for part of the country that supports NDP and its well-known and dearly loved Jack Layton, this cancer caused by asbestos is actually given or, I can say, forced on the people by the Canadian government. Carol, my heart is dying knowing that my husband might not even live to be 57 years old, never mind to enjoy retirement".

He worked for the federal government. It is just atrocious what is happening to them. It is really sad that he could not have access to treatment for this at an early stage.

She further says, "I ran out of options. All I am doing is watching my husband dying. It's not necessary. It did not and does not have to be this way".

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Before I call on the hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île, I must inform her that I will have to interrupt her when the time provided for government orders has expired. I will let her know when she has one minute remaining.

Ms. Ève Péclat (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to address the NDP motion. To clarify certain things, this motion includes a plan to ban the export of asbestos and a plan to retrain workers in that industry and help them recover from the current crisis. In 1991, the asbestos industry employed about 1,500 workers in Thetford Mines. Today, there are only 350, who work three to four months a year. Right now, the asbestos industry is going through a crisis, because more and more countries are banning asbestos. They no longer want it. Indeed, some 50 countries have already banned it, but Canada is not one of them. We are the only country, the only western power, the only western democracy that is dead set against declaring asbestos a hazardous product.

In 1998, Canada banned the use of asbestos in everything, including buildings, but we continue to export it to countries that have less stringent occupational health and safety standards or building codes. If the hon. member thinks this is not the case, then why is the government spending millions of dollars to remove asbestos from buildings if it is not banned and it is not dangerous?

Since this morning, the government has been repeating over and over that its budget is fantastic, that it provides tons of money to create jobs. However, it is totally silent on the asbestos industry. We should talk about it here. The government has subsidized 160 trade delegations to 60 countries to promote asbestos. It has spent money to promote asbestos. Why not use that money to establish a subsidy fund for older workers in that industry and to diversify our economy, so that it is not based on products that kill 100,000 people every year?

Canada has no shortage of natural resources. Our economy is not based only on asbestos. I will not let the government tell Canadians that the NDP is opposed to the mining industry. That is not true. I remind the House of what the hon. member for Newton—North Delta repeated: just because we oppose a product that is dangerous for Canadians and for everyone else in the world does not mean we are necessarily opposed to products that are not dangerous.

I am not going to get technical, but there are alternative materials. The government could take the money that it is spending on lobbyists and on trade missions, not to mention the \$250,000 given in each of the past three years to the Chrysotile Institute, and invest it in alternative energies. We know that such alternatives exist and the hon. member should know it too.

In Thetford Mines, 350 people work three to four months per year. It would be very easy to take the millions of dollars that were spent and create a subsidy fund to allow these workers to recover from the crisis and retire in dignity. In doing so, we would also diversify our economy. We know that diversifying the economy is something very important for the Conservatives. Here is a solution for the government: to invest in alternative energies and materials, and to set up a subsidy fund for asbestos workers.

Yet, today I did not hear any Conservative member propose a solution. The government only told us that its economic recovery budget was fantastic and that it had created 600,000 jobs, but it said nothing about asbestos.

• (1810)

NDP members rose on many occasions to call government members to order and tell them that their speeches were not relevant to the motion before the House.

We are not asking the government to merely ban asbestos, but to invest and subsidize people. We are asking the government not only to do that, but to also take the money that it gives to large corporations and lobbyists, the money it uses to send delegations abroad. The government is spending millions of dollars annually. It should take that money and give it to Canadians rather than to large corporations. It should take that money and give it to those Canadians who need it.

I am going to conclude by saying that even Health Canada has refuted the claim made by the Conservatives to the effect that asbestos can be used safely. That is absolutely false. Even the official opposition in Quebec is asking the provincial government to set up a parliamentary committee to look at the effects of asbestos on health, because it is worried.

• (1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Order. It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The vote stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that you see the clock at 6:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

SERVICE CANADA

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 20 I raised two questions in the House. One was to do with the fact that the Conservative government was spending \$90,000 a day for an outside consultant to plan cuts to the Service Canada operation. Subsequently, I asked a question about the cuts to services at EI processing centres and what kind of impact that would have on Canadians. We have asked this question a number of times in the House and still have not received a satisfactory answer, so once again I am here raising the issue.

There are a number of questions that have come up, including the fact that there does not appear to be any kind of analysis or detailed analysis that is available to the public on the impact on services to the public and to the affected communities.

As well, when we are talking about Service Canada, we are not just talking about the processing of employment insurance claims, we are also talking about claims that involve payments for maternity leave, sick leave and compassionate leave.

The minister, on a number of occasions, has talked about the need for automation. What she has failed to tell the House is that the ability to apply has now been automated for five years, but that less than 50% of the claims are fully automated. The balance of those claims require some sort of involvement from an employee. Even a tiny anomaly on an EI claim requires a staff person to become involved. That ensures the person who filed a claim in many cases does not get his or her cheque within 28 days, which is part of the speed of service processing that Service Canada has committed to.

There are also some troubling statistics with regard to the kind of service when people need an answer about the delay on their claim. In September the abandoned rate for calls for EI has increased in the call centres. In two centres, Vancouver and Winnipeg, nearly one in

every three employment insurance calls was abandoned in the last week of September. That means people call and they cannot get information about whether or not they can expect a cheque to pay their bills.

Over half of employment insurance callers are being told that their call cannot be transferred due to high volume. In the last week of September half of all CPP and OAS callers got a busy signal when they tried to call. They could not even connect with the interactive voice response system, so one has to wonder when Canadians are getting that quality of service, obviously the minister has not explained to Canadians what the impact of the cuts will be.

Why is the automated system still rejecting over 50% of the claims? Where is the Service Canada and HRSDC business case for closing all of the offices and laying off staff? Why is the government moving its operations from areas where office space is inexpensive to large urban centres where rental rates are considerably higher? With technology, workers no longer need to be centralized in urban centres. There are a number of points here that Canadians will be very interested in hearing from the parliamentary secretary.

• (1820)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased once again to respond to the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan on her concerns about providing services to out-of-work Canadians.

I will begin by dealing with an issue that has been in the news a significant amount lately, the fact that Service Canada is not renewing the contracts of some 330 temporary employees.

Service Canada must deliver services efficiently and effectively. To do this it must ensure that its workforce is aligned with its operational needs. It is the nature of our business that our needs vary from season to season and from year to year, which is why we need the flexibility of using temporary workers.

These 330 employees were hired for a specific length of time during the economic downturn to help us cope with the surge in applications for employment insurance. They were hired for a specific period of time. This was indicated on their contracts. There was no promise expressed or implied that their contracts would be renewed at the end of their term.

As members know, our government has made a commitment to reduce both its spending and its size. Our government is working toward eliminating the deficit and returning to balanced budgets while continually improving services delivered to Canadians.

We know that Canadians want efficient government that gives them good value for their hard-earned tax dollars. It is our job to make sure Canadian taxpayer dollars are used wisely. Canadians expect no less from their government. That is why we are moving forward with the next phase of the EI modernization initiative which began in 2005.

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Service Canada will continue to modernize the delivery of EI by automating its processing, consolidating its processing sites, and managing its workload more efficiently. Automation has already made EI processing more accurate and has resulted in significant savings. In fact, thanks to automation, the EI processing costs have been reduced by almost 30% since 2003.

In addition, the workforce management strategy is in effect to assist with planned personnel changes. This will include attrition, reassessments and training. All changes will occur within the parameters of the collective agreements.

Processing no longer needs to be done in a paper-based system. With our new technology and workload distribution system, an EI claimant can have his or her file processed electronically by the next available agent in any processing centre anywhere in the country. This saves time for everyone and money for Canadian taxpayers.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, there is one point on which the parliamentary secretary and I would agree, which is that unemployed workers would like to see their claims processed efficiently and effectively.

We find that because of Service Canada's planned reductions in workers who deliver these services, it is not able to process these claims effectively and efficiently. We have seen that when the government cannot meet the speed of service targets, it changes the targets. It used to be that when people called to get information about their claim, Service Canada had 48 hours to provide the information. Now the target has been moved to five days.

Unemployed Canadians rely on their EI cheques to pay their bills. There is an impact on communities and small businesses. Could the parliamentary secretary explain the impact of these proposed service cuts on communities? What is the impact to unemployed Canadians who are relying on this money to pay their bills?

• (1825)

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, the way in which EI claims are currently processed is out of date. In 2007-08, we began to consolidate our EI processing sites for greater efficiency. Over the next three years, EI processing will be consolidated into 22 regional sites. We will ease the transition to a smaller workforce through attrition, reassignment and training. Affected employees will be considered for other positions.

The modernization at Service Canada will give Canadians in every region of the country better access to employment insurance and a host of other Government of Canada services. We will all benefit from this.

THE ECONOMY

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiyan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are here tonight to discuss the topic of graduate unemployment and underemployment. Back in September a report was released showing that Canadian university graduates are being shut out of the job market at an alarming rate.

This report showed that a whopping one in five Canadian graduates is employed in a position that pays at the lower end of the income scale. This means that 20% of our university graduates are earning an income of less than the national median of \$37,000. This

income is not very much. Too many of our Canadian new graduates are living below the poverty line.

These findings mean that Canada has the highest proportion of poor university graduates of any of the OECD countries. While the majority of Canadian graduates do earn more than non-university graduates over the course of their lifetime, this report reveals that for far too many of our graduates, their degree is not worth their investment in both time and money. This is not right. We are talking about our best and brightest here. Instead of helping to strengthen our economy, their degrees and skills are being wasted.

I asked a question on this topic on September 27. Unfortunately, when I asked this question, the minister did not rise and talk about what the government is doing to actually create more jobs and create more opportunities for the most educated in our country. No, instead, the minister stood up and spoke about tax credits.

How do tax credits help graduates find jobs? What good is a tax credit if they do not have jobs? What message are we sending to our university graduates when after spending years and thousands of dollars on earning a degree, they are forced into jobs that are greatly below their education standard?

We know that our university grads are getting jobs at the low end of the income scale. What message are we sending to our youth when the only jobs available to them are part-time or shift work? What hope for tomorrow do we give to these people?

This is a question that I am often asked on the doorsteps in my constituency. My riding is one of the poorest in the GTA, yet many of the families that live there are spending their life savings or incurring extreme amounts of debt to send their children to school, only to then have their children graduate and not be able to find jobs or they find severely underpaying jobs.

While these graduates do not have well-paying jobs, the one thing we know they have for sure is debt. On average, Canadian students are graduating with a debt load of over \$25,000, and tuition fees, unfortunately, continue to rise at four times the rate of inflation.

Getting a degree is not getting any cheaper, and now these graduates do not have jobs to look forward to to help them pay back their student loans. The fact that the cost for post-secondary education is rising coupled with low job prospects may in turn deter Canadians from pursuing post-secondary education. Many Canadians may decide that the debt associated with pursuing post-secondary studies is just not worth it.

If the government is as serious as it says it is about securing Canada's economic future, it would make a commitment to education. If it was really concerned with Canada's economic recovery, it would create real jobs and real opportunities for our nation's best and brightest.

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Many youth and graduates in my constituency and across the country cannot find work at all. What are we saying to these people who are already marginalized because of their age, ethnicity, status in the country, and their household income? What are we telling them? Are we telling them that they are not worth planning for? Why not provide our graduates and our youth with a sense of importance and value? Why not provide them with opportunities, like jobs and access to post-secondary education?

Why not give them hope? On this side of the House, that is what we believe in. Our university graduates need jobs. They need real jobs that will help them make ends meet, that will help them support their families, that will help them and their children lead better lives. This is what we have been fighting for on this side of the House. We have been asking the government for a real economic recovery plan. We have been asking the government for real action on unemployment and underemployment.

I will ask my question again tonight, when will the government stop the inaction and come forward with a real jobs plan, with real opportunities for Canadian graduates?

•(1830)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to discuss Canada's economy and outline our Conservative government's record in helping create jobs and supporting Canadian students.

First and foremost, our Conservative government is squarely focused on what matters to Canadians, helping create jobs and promoting economic growth.

As Statistics Canada announced today, Canada's economy grew yet again in August. That is positive news, along with the fact that approximately 650,000 net new jobs have been created since July 2009. It is an encouraging sign that our government is on the right track for the economy and hard-working families.

Indeed, on the job creation front, Canada has an enviable record when compared to other G7 countries. Canada has posted the strongest employment growth in the G7 since mid-2009, and of those approximately 650,000 net new jobs created since July 2009, over 90% have been full-time and nearly 80% have been in the private sector.

For the benefit of the NDP member, I draw her attention to the September 2011 OECD employment outlook for an independent assessment of Canada's job market. The report states:

—the labour market is recovering faster in Canada than in many OECD countries...Canada's long-term unemployment is among the lowest in the OECD, suggesting that job prospects have remained fairly positive—

Nevertheless, we recognize the global recovery is fragile, especially in the United States and Europe, and equally as important, too many Canadians, especially our young people, are still looking for work.

That is why we are working and focused on implementing the next phase of Canada's economic action plan, including its key steps to help Canadian students and youth succeed in the global economy with the help of the best education possible.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan includes several smart and targeted steps to help students and youth in their education and support as they need it, such as: the student loan forgiveness for doctors and nurses working in rural and remote areas; extending tax relief for skills certification exams, to make all occupational, trade and professional exam fees eligible for tax relief through the tuition tax credit; doubling the in-study income exemption from \$50 per week to \$100 per week, benefiting over 100,000 students by allowing them to work more without negatively affecting their income; reducing the in-study interest rate for part-time Canadian student loan recipients; increasing the family income threshold for part-time Canada loans and Canada student grant recipients, bringing the eligibility thresholds in line with the thresholds for full-time students; and providing \$20 million to help the Canadian Youth Business Foundation to support young entrepreneurs.

The next phase of Canada's economic action plan is working. I encourage the NDP to support the next phase of Canada's action plan and these significant initiatives for students.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiyan: Mr. Speaker, the government can talk all it wants about legislation it has passed, tax credits it has implemented, and making more debt available for students, but at the end of the day, the government has not really helped our graduates. How does a tax credit actually help an individual find a job? It does not.

We have our best and brightest working at jobs that are significantly lower than their education level. This is not because these people are not looking hard enough. This is because these jobs just do not exist, and the creation of more precarious part-time jobs are not the types of jobs that our university graduates are looking for.

What does the government not understand about this? I do not understand what the government does not understand. We need real jobs for our graduates and for all Canadians. We need good jobs. We need full-time permanent jobs, not more precarious ones.

Why will the government not act to support our nation's graduates and why will it not create a real job plan with tangible opportunities for Canada's graduates?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: As I mentioned before, Mr. Speaker, the next phase of Canada's economic action plan contains many positive measures for Canadian youth, measures that the NDP and the member opposite unfortunately voted against.

I suggest the NDP members talk to important groups about their assessment of the plan and reconsider their opposition. They should talk to organizations like the National Association of Career Colleges who said about the plan:

Students were hoping for positive news from the government, and this government has delivered. The government's proposal will allow more students to access post-secondary education training.

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While our Conservative government has focused on jobs, economic growth and helping youth, the NDP is disappointingly opposed to our plan, and instead is focused on tax increases on families and employers.

• (1835)

G8 SUMMIT

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I posed a question back on October 5 to the President of the Treasury Board. He has not risen to answer any questions with respect to G8 spending.

Fifty million dollars was spent out of the border infrastructure fund. The money that was spent in the minister's riding really had nothing to do with the border infrastructure fund, so that money should not really have been spent in the minister's riding. That \$50 million was spent on projects that did not qualify to come out of that particular fund. I have to question the government's priorities when it spent \$50 million from the border infrastructure fund and cut \$56 million from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

The Auditor General said that "rules were broken" with respect to how that \$50 million was spent. When the Minister of Foreign Affairs stands to defend the President of the Treasury Board, he always responds by saying that the government is paying attention to what the Auditor General had to say. It is all well and good for the Minister of Foreign Affairs to say that, but in reality \$50 million was spent on projects for which the money was not intended.

When I look at what the government is doing in terms of cutting \$56 million from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, all I can do is shake my head and think that the government has it all wrong. It is spending money from the border infrastructure fund on projects that should never have been approved under that fund, while at the same time it is cutting \$56 million from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, thereby cutting services and safety. That is such an important department in terms of a renewable resource. As an example, cutting the marine sub-centres in St. John's and Quebec will impact on the safety of anyone who goes on the ocean, not just fishers.

The government is also making cuts to the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council, the very body that takes science into account, that takes the input of fishers—the people with the experience—into account, and takes the industry into account. The government is cutting from the Department of Fisheries and Oceans something that is vitally important to the future of our country. It is extremely important to the future of people not just in Newfoundland and Labrador, but the entire country. We are talking about a renewable resource.

Because the government had spent this money without any approval and because there was some suggestion that the RCMP was investigating the legality of how that money had been spent, I put my question to the minister. I asked him if he or any of his former staff had been approached by the RCMP. I raise the question now to the parliamentary secretary, because I did not get an answer: has the minister and/or his former staff been approached by the RCMP about the legality of how the money out of the border infrastructure fund was spent?

• (1840)

Ms. Kellie Leitch (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development and to the Minister of Labour, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is like the movie *Groundhog Day*. I am back again. Hopefully, I am getting better at this. I thank the member for her question.

I am pleased to rise in the House today to respond to the question posed by the hon. member for Random—Burin—St. George's. The G8 legacy fund was an investment in public infrastructure that has benefited the region and its communities while supporting the G8 summit. The fund improved tourism and recreational facilities; upgraded sidewalks, parks and lighting; and ensured safer highways for residents in the region. Residents and visitors to the region will be able to take advantage of these improvements well into the future.

As well as leaving a legacy to the region, these projects also contributed to Canada's successful hosting of the G8 summit in Huntsville. The Muskoka region was responsible for hosting the 2010 summit and needed to be ready to showcase Canada to international guests and media, such as heads of state, senior dignitaries and countless delegates from the world's leading countries.

While supporting Canada's hosting role, the intent of the fund was also to provide a legacy to the communities and the people in the region. This has traditionally been the case when Canada hosts such high-profile international events. Similar events were completed in Vancouver, Kananaskis, Quebec City, Moncton and Halifax. Hosting an international event of this scale in the Muskoka-Parry Sound region was important for Canada. The G8 legacy fund helped the region prepare for and host the international delegations, showcasing our beautiful country to the world.

The Auditor General reported that Infrastructure Canada worked to ensure that every G8 legacy project met the program's conditions. All of these projects were identified by municipalities and the province as a local priority. They provided lasting benefits to their communities and contributed to a successfully hosted G8 summit. Every dollar was spent on eligible costs for approved public infrastructure projects. The Auditor General reviewed this program and made a number of important observations and recommendations for improvement. We have been clear that we have accepted this report and its findings.

Hosting the G8 summit put Canada on the world stage, and the G8 legacy fund helped in making it successful.

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, it would appear that I am not going to get the answer from the parliamentary secretary any more than I got an answer from the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

The reality is, rules were broken. That is the problem I have with how this money from the border infrastructure fund was spent. It certainly was not meant to be spent in Muskoka, and it certainly was not meant to be spent without the approval of Parliament, which is exactly what happened.

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The problem I have with all of this is that the government can stand and talk about how the money was spent, acknowledge that the Auditor General said that rules were broken, and then turn around and treat areas of this country with such total lack of respect in terms of what needs to be done to keep the country going and to make viable options. For instance, through an agency like the Department of Fisheries and Oceans, we know that cutting to the tune of \$56 million will have a devastating impact on the people who make a living from the fishery. Why in the name of Heaven the government would cut the Fisheries Resource Conservation Council and at the same time turn around and invest money in things like a fake lighthouse and fake lakes is beyond me. It does not make sense. Why is the government not recognizing the importance of putting money where it counts, instead of doing things that the Auditor General says was breaking the rules?

Ms. Kellie Leitch: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned before, the G8 legacy fund helped the region prepare for hosting the 2010 G8 summit and provided a legacy to the region. Tourism infrastructure was renovated, a new University of Waterloo Summit Centre for the Environment was constructed, roads were upgraded and community infrastructure was improved in towns throughout the region. These

projects meant a successful hosting of the summit, and residents as well as visitors to the region continue to benefit from these projects.

The Auditor General found that all 32 projects met the program's terms and conditions. She found that officials maintained project records and established frameworks to deliver the programs with due diligence. Every dollar was spent on eligible costs for eligible projects.

The summit, like other previous international meetings held in Canada, was an important occasion for our country to present itself to the world. Every project was completed in time for the summit, contributing to this great opportunity for our country.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:45 p.m.)

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